BCCAT

BRITISH COLUMBIA COUNCIL
ON ADMISSIONS & TRANSFER

# Recalibrating the BC Transfer System

## A BCCAT CONSULTATION

## Report to Council

## Report and Recommendations Received and Approved in Principle

October 6, 2006

## TABLE OF CONTENTS


| | |
|---|---|
| SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS | 3 |
| INTRODUCTION | 7 |
| ISSUE 1: Organization of the BC Transfer Guide - Sending/Receiving Designation | 11 |
| ISSUE 2: Regional Transfer Guides and Transfer Protocols | 16 |
| ISSUE 3: Conversion of Case-by-Case Transfer to Articulation-Based Transfer | 20 |
| ISSUE 4: Recording of Public/Private Articulation Agreements | 23 |
| ISSUE 5: Recording Out-of-Province Articulation Agreements | 27 |
| ISSUE 6: Developing More Program Transfer Information and Innovative Transfer Models | 29 |
| ISSUE 7: Is it time for a complete re-examination of the BC Transfer Model? | 32 |
| ISSUE 8: Priorities, Suggestions and Advice | 36 |
| CONCLUSIONS | 42 |
| ***APPENDIX:*** | ***44*** |
| ***Consultation Paper and Questions*** | ***44*** |

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The following is a summary of the recommendations which are also outlined at the end of each issue-related section.

### ISSUE 1: Organization of the BC Transfer Guide – Sending/Receiving Designation

**Recommendation 1.1:**

*That BCCAT staff develop a paper that explores fully the implication of lifting current designation restrictions. This paper will:*

- *provide an outline of the tasks, roles and responsibilities involved in each designation;*
- *examine the effect on other institutions, on BCCAT and on the system as a whole, of one institution's decision to add a designation, as well as of multiple institutions' decisions;*
- *consider a potential set of criteria for applying for redesignation, such as the institution's rationale for its designation request, evidence of student transfer numbers, provision of information about transfer options, etc;*
- *propose a possible application process, which may include, for example, a requirement for the institution to commit to providing the resources needed to support the designation functions;*
- *outline options for action once a decision has been made by a) sending institutions and b) receiving institutions. Options should adhere to best practice and efficient processes, and may include recommendations such as that all institutions adding the receiving institution designation begin the process of constructing their transfer tables by using existing databases and a process of triangulation, prior to soliciting course-to-course articulations from sending institutions.*

**Recommendation 1.2:**

*That staff seek input from system groups in the development of this paper and in its draft recommendations.*

**Recommendation 1.3:**

*That the TAC discuss this paper and forward their recommendations to Council.*

### ISSUE 2: Regional Transfer Guides and Transfer Protocols

**Recommendation 2.1:**

*That BCCAT investigate implementing a search-by-region mechanism as an enhancement to BC Transfer Guide.*

**Recommendation 2.2:**

*That BCCAT not pursue, at this time, any form of regionally-limited articulation.*

**Recommendation 2.3:**

*That BCCAT continue to offer to facilitate transfer protocols where institutions request it, or where such a protocol enables transfer that would not occur in any other way, but that we otherwise not promote actively the use of transfer protocols as an alternative to course-to-course articulation for public institutions.*

## ISSUE 3: Conversion of Case-by-Case Transfer to Articulation-Based Transfer

**Recommendation 3.1:**

*That BCCAT inform receiving institutions that, at their request, we will facilitate the articulation of third and fourth year courses in the BC Transfer Guide, using the Transfer Credit Evaluation System. There should be no obligation on any institution, sending or receiving, to submit or evaluate third and/or fourth year courses for transfer credit.*

**Recommendation 3.2:**

*That BCCAT investigate the feasibility of exploring with BCIT a) the scope of student transfer to and from BCIT and b) the experiences of students who transfer to and from BCIT. These projects can be planned for 2007-08, or as resources become available, and should be based on the willingness of BCIT to engage in such investigation.*

**Recommendation 3.3:**

*That BCCAT investigate the feasibility of exploring with UBC and SFU a) the scope of students transferring between the two universities and b) the experience of students with their transfer. These projects can be planned for 2007-08, or as resources become available, and should be based on the willingness of UBC and SFU to engage in such investigation.*

## ISSUE 4: Recording of Public/Private Articulation Agreements

**Recommendation 4.1:**

*That BCCAT attempt to gather information about the number of students attending private institutions, and about the potential demand for private/public transfer.*

**Recommendation 4.2:**

*That BCCAT staff formulate an issues paper, for discussion by the TAC and Council, on recording private/public articulation agreements in the BC Transfer Guide, based on the advice received in this consultation. The paper would include possible draft policy options for the circumstances under which such agreements would be recorded, and how they would be represented in the BC Transfer Guide.*

**Recommendation 4.3:**

*That BCCAT continue to examine a more comprehensive approach to the inclusion of private institutions in the BC Transfer System.*

## ISSUE 5: Recording Out-of Province Articulation Agreements

**Recommendation 5.1:**

*That BCCAT staff prepare a document for discussion at the TAC and Council that outlines the conditions under which Council would entertain an application from an out-of-province institution that might apply for inclusion in the BC Transfer System.*

## ISSUE 6: Development More Program Transfer Information and Innovative Transfer Models

**Recommendation 6.1:**

*That BCCAT continue to provide funding and support to articulation committees and other groups that wish to pursue projects to improve transfer in specific disciplines, whether in academic or career areas.*

**Recommendation 6.2**

*That priority for funding should be given to projects that hold the promise of solving transfer difficulties in high-traffic disciplines, such as Flexible Pre-Major or multilateral transfer guide projects, and that BCCAT makes every effort to communicate clearly what such projects involve.*

## ISSUE 7: Is it time for a complete re-examination of the BC Transfer Model?

**Recommendation 7.1:**

*That in contemplating changes in articulation and/or transfer policy or practice, BCCAT is guided by the principle of ensuring an efficient and effective transfer environment for students, while respecting the autonomy of institutions and their capacity to undertake changes in policy or practice.*

**Recommendation 7.2:**

*That any changes to the structure of the BC Transfer System or to the nature and amount of transfer information available in the BC Transfer Guide be examined carefully to ensure that such changes do not result in unintended negative consequences for students or place undue administrative burdens on institutions or on BCCAT.*

**See also Recommendation 6.2.**

Other recommendations relevant to this section are to be determined and may be considered tantamount to the whole of recommendations provided in this report.

## ISSUE 8: Priorities, Suggestions and Advice

**Recommendation 8.1:**

*That, once Council has had an opportunity to review this report, it establishes an order of priority in which action items should be addressed. Consideration may be given to ranking the following items highest:*

- *exploring whether and how best to lift restrictions on sending/receiving designations for all institutions;*
- *continuing to promote and provide funding for articulation projects such as multilateral transfer, Flexible Pre-Major and block transfer, in specific disciplines;*
- *exploring what transfer, currently conducted on a case-by-case basis, should or could be converted to articulation-based transfer. Start with areas where relevant groups or institutions are willing to participate;*
- *working on public-private articulation issues;*
- *examining appropriate recording of inter-provincial transfer.*

**Recommendation 8.2:**

*That, given the importance of hearing from students, and given the low response rate received from students to the Recalibrating survey, that an additional survey be designed, targeted at students, with an invitation to participate posted on the BC Transfer Guide website.*

**Recommendation 8.3:**

*That BCCAT, in its communication plan, emphasize the dissemination of its information resources to appropriate target audiences, and examine how best to make its technology accessible to institutions through web services.*

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Background

In November 2005, the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer launched a consultation entitled *Recalibrating the BC Transfer System* with the institutional members of the BC Transfer System and other interested parties. This consultation was motivated in large part by significant changes in the BC post-secondary system over the last decade, and concern that these changes had not resulted in concomitant adjustments in the structure of the BC Transfer System or the organization of the BC Transfer Guide. We also accepted the premise that, since it is likely that the post-secondary system will continue to evolve, it is important that we develop some vision for not only how we adapt to current conditions, but also how we position the BC Transfer System for the challenges and opportunities the next decade will bring.

Therefore, the objectives of our consultation were to understand the scope and nature of the concerns which had been expressed to us at various meetings and by various institutions, and to seek the best advice we could from the system about what changes or adaptations are needed. Because we continue to receive confirmation that, on the whole, the transfer system functions well, we wanted to avoid the impression that it was broken. Hence we chose the word "recalibration" to convey the sense that what is needed are adjustments, to ensure continuing functionality within an ever changing environment.

We authored a discussion paper (see Appendix) and invited responses through various media. The paper identified various issues that have arisen as a result of the evolving system:

- The organization of the BC Transfer Guide along traditional lines, designating institutions as either sending institutions or receiving institutions (or both, in selected cases), was seen by some institutions as unfairly hindering their ability to promote their roles as either sending or receiving institutions.
- Related to this, recent new data indicate that, while traditional university transfer is still dominated by student movement from college to university, many students are also moving between institutions and programs in ways that do not mirror the traditional patterns. Little information is available to help them plan.
- Private institutions serve many students in BC yet there are few bridges to enable those students to transfer to public institutions to pursue further studies.
- The same can be said for some out-of-province institutions.
- Transfer in traditional academic disciplines can still be challenging because of the variation between receiving institutions in the requirements for the pre-major.
- Little information exists to guide students who wish to transfer in many career and vocational programs.

## B. Methodology

The consultation paper contained a series of questions. BCCAT designed an online survey based on these questions and sent consultation invitations widely across the post-secondary system. In addition to inviting response via the online survey, we also welcomed emailed responses since "this may be preferable for those responding formally on behalf of an institution or organization, or those who wish to address issues beyond the survey questions."

In order to maximize participation in the consultation, we utilized our communication networks to reach members of articulation committees, and various system groups such as registrars, deans, vice-presidents, institutional contacts, student organizations, education councils, and system agencies. In addition, we attempted to contact students and interested faculty or individuals. We also tried to communicate with those outside the current BC Transfer System, through the BC Career Colleges Association, the Private Career Training Institutions Agency (PCTIA), Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT), and any other means available.

Besides the online survey, we used three occasions for face-to-face discussion. The first was the annual meeting of Articulation Committee Chairs and System Liaison Persons (SLPs) which took place on February 3, 2006. Several guests from the private post-secondary sector were invited to participate in this meeting. Under the leadership of a moderator, each table was assigned one of five sets of questions for discussion. Since there were 15 tables, we received advice on each question from three groups of faculty and administrators from a variety of institutions and program areas. We took advantage of this opportunity to ask for advice on specific aspects of the issues presented in the consultation paper, allowing for more thorough examination of some questions. Finally, we asked each group to assign a red, green or amber light to each issue – stop, go ahead, or proceed with caution.

The second occasion was the annual meeting of Institutional Contact Persons (ICPs) on April 21st, 2006. Findings of the survey were presented, and participants were asked some further questions to engage in discussion with those at their table. While some questions were identical to those posed at the Articulation Chairs' meeting, others were tailored to the specific knowledge of the system that ICPs possess.

The final occasion was a meeting of the Academic and Career/Technical Deans (from colleges and university colleges) on May 26th at Kwantlen University College. While there was a general discussion of the survey results at this meeting, there was only time for in-depth discussion and advice about issue number 1 – Sending/Receiving Designation.

Collecting advice and comment through the means we used (the online consultation, emailed responses, and face-to-face meetings) offered both advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, the number of people involved was significant: we received 150 responses to the consultation and involved 140 individuals in face-to-face discussion. Since most participants were very familiar with the transfer system, the advice we received was, for the most part, from knowledgeable sources. Many respondents contributed thoughtful and insightful comments both through the comment boxes in the online survey, or through emailed responses. Given the size of the BC Transfer System, a large response rate is important, since broad participation can function to improve buy-in for eventual recommendations and action.

On the other hand, use of an online survey, and especially reliance on radio-button choices, can promote responses that are facile rather than thoughtful or balanced. Where participants to the online survey added comments, in some cases it was impossible to divine the intent or meaning of those comments. Finally, dissemination of information about the survey, and invitation to respond, was through electronic means, using the email lists, contacts and networks available to us. The response profile, described below, was likely skewed by this methodology.

### C. Response Profile

150[1] responses were received, mostly through the online survey. Responses could also be submitted by email. The majority of respondents identified themselves as faculty members or administrators, with only 8% of all respondents identifying themselves as staff. Disappointingly, few students (individually or on behalf of a group) responded, despite specific attempts to solicit their participation. Responses to this survey, then, have been offered through the lens of those who manage and coordinate the transfer system and those responsible for the articulation processes that underpin it, rather than through the lens of those who consume it.

| Question 20: I am primarily: | | |
|---|---|---|
| An administrator | 50 | 41% |
| A faculty member/Instructor | 61 | 50% |
| A student | 4 | 3% |
| A researcher | 1 | 1% |
| Staff | 9 | 7% |
| Other | 10 | 8% |
| **Total:** | **135** | **100%** |

Approximately two thirds (63%) of respondents were from public colleges or university colleges. Only 14% represented universities. 12% of respondents identified themselves as associated with private institutions, and 2 % with government. The vast majority of respondents (80%) were from the public post-secondary system and often individuals with a long history of participation in articulation and transfer matters. Their comments were, understandably, based upon their relationship to that system as insiders.

| Question 21: I am chiefly associated with: | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public University | Public College | Public Institute | Public University College | Private Institution | Government | Other | **Total** |
| 18 | 59 | 4 | 20 | 15 | 2 | 8 | **126** |
| 14% | 47% | 3% | 16% | 12% | 2% | 6% | **100%** |

[1] Some respondents to the online survey, however, refrained from providing answers to some questions. This explains varying numbers of responses from question to question.

Most respondents indicated that they were responding on their own behalf.

| Question 22: I have submitted this response on behalf of: | | |
|---|---|---|
| Myself | 103 | 81% |
| An institution or an organization | 24 | 19% |
| **Total** | **127** | **100%** |

Responses received from institutions and organizations, either via the online survey or by email, bring the proportion of formal responses to 19%. We use the term "formal response" to identify those that we understand to have been authorized though some committee process, and which represent the considered and consensual position of a group, such as an education council, a senate committee, a student council, or a system committee.

We did not attempt to weight formal responses in relation to individual responses. However, we took particular note of the points raised in formal responses, and allowed them to exert more influence on our interpretation and analysis. In the case of university responses, we also felt that even though only 14% of respondents were from universities the fact that formal responses were received from the University Presidents' Council (TUPC), the Confederation of University Faculty Associations – BC (CUFA-BC), and the University of Victoria, helped somewhat to redress this imbalance.

It cannot be assumed, however, that formal responses from like organizations gave similar advice. In one case, two formal responses were received from one college – one from a deans' group and one from the Education Council. While identical in some respects, the responses differed diametrically on particular questions. Similarly, formal responses from universities or from organizations representing university constituencies differed in the advice they gave on many key questions. However, some broad tendencies are visible. For example, public colleges and private institutions are most likely to advocate for change, while institutes, universities and university colleges are more likely to support the status quo (see analysis of Question 14).

### D. Organization of the Report

In the following report, we present the findings of the consultation, organized by issue.[2] In our analysis we weigh responses received through the online survey and through the face-to-face discussions. Finally, we offer recommendations for consideration.

[2] Results in the tables are for numbers of respondents, unless labelled as percentages.

## ISSUE 1: Organization of the BC Transfer Guide - Sending/Receiving Designation

Over the last few years, BCCAT has heard from several institutions that are currently designated as sending institutions but who also wish to become receiving institutions. The main reason for this request is that the institution has become degree-granting, and wishes to invite articulations from other institutions in the system that are potential feeders to their degree programs. In addition, we have heard from some institutions designated as receiving institutions, who wish to also become sending institutions. These are often new private institutions that wish to articulate with universities, in the expectation that the rogour of the articulation process will assist them to ensure that their courses are equivalent to those offered at universities.

Over and above these specific reasons, we have also become increasingly aware that students are moving through the system in non-traditional ways. Recent Central Data Warehouse (CDW) data reveal that close to 50% of students moving through the system are moving in ways other than college to university. Institutions are naturally keen to provide information to those students.

Institutions have also told us that the rationale behind the designations seems increasingly unsustainable. BCCAT has traditionally designated an institution as sending or receiving based on two criteria:

1) Its status as a degree-granting institution. Universities were receiving institutions, colleges were sending institutions, and university colleges were both.
2) Private institutions with degree authorization have been designated as receiving institutions, but for their degree programs only.

A public college with degree authorization that wishes to be designated as a receiving institution perceives it to be unfair that a private institution can receive that designation where it can not. Likewise, private institutions perceive that they are prevented from articulating with universities, by virtue of their designation as receiving institutions. There has been no formal process established to appeal designation, or to request redesignation.

Designations have their roots in the structure of the print version of the BC Transfer Guide. Organised as a grid, each sending institution had a section, with receiving institutions ranged across the top of the page. Thus, it was possible to easily search by courses at sending institutions, although not to search by courses at receiving institutions. The online guide provides the facility to search by both sending and receiving institution, and its flexible interface supported by a large database removes some of the original rationale behind the designations.

The argument to retain designations beyond the structure that necessitated them is based on concerns regarding the size and sustainability of the BC Transfer Guide and the BC Transfer System. The Guide currently contains 91,000 total course-to-course articulations, including 55,000 active agreements. Each new course must be evaluated, and each articulation agreement must be maintained, and periodically checked for currency. Most of this work is carried out at institutions. At what point could the system buckle under the weight of an ever-increasing number of agreements. Is increased complexity ultimately a good thing or a bad thing for the system? Is there a tipping point?

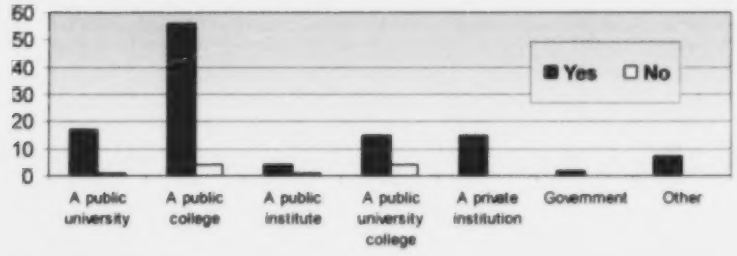
## A. Consultation Responses

Of the 140 responses received to Question 1, only 9 answered no, marking this question as the issue to which we received the most decisive response.

| Question 1: | Should all institutions be able to request designation as both a sending and receiving institution? | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 131 | 94% |
| No | 9 | 6% |
| **Total** | **140** | **100%** |

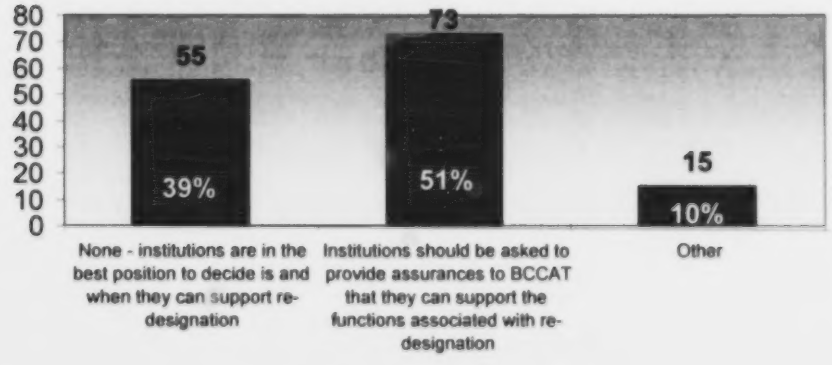
This is not surprising, given the changes in the degree-granting status of many institutions in recent years. In the context of such change, the strongly-held value of institutional autonomy exerts pressure for self-determination rather than acceptance of an assigned designation as sending or receiving, especially where that designation may be perceived to be counter to the interests of the institution. All types of institutions were equally likely to show a clear majority in the yes category for this question.

**Question 1: Should all institutions be able to request designation as both a sending and receiving institution?**




Interestingly, given the high level of support for liberalizing designation, respondents were divided on whether or not BCCAT should continue to exert some form of managing role of the assigning of a designation, with only 39% of respondents indicating that they do not think that BCCAT should require any assurances.

**Question 2: What criteria, if any, should be applied to re-designation?**



In examining the comments offered by respondents to the question of designation, a certain caution emerges. Despite the overwhelming majority of yes responses to Question 1, it becomes obvious that significant concerns remain. From a review of the comments received, we see that these concerns take shape around issues of workload, quality control and the need to base action on evidence.

- *Workload:* Institutions already strapped for resources need to understand what additional resources are needed to add the complementary designation. Efficient processes are paramount.
- *Quality control:* Not all institutions relish the idea that they will be placed in the position of having to articulate with any institution that designates itself a receiving institution. There is an concern that some institutions will request receiving designation as a marketing tool, rather than based on numbers of students transferring
- *Evidence-based action:* Are there thresholds beyond which institutions should switch to articulation-based transfer? Institutions should submit a proposal that includes a reasoned argument supported by documentation of student numbers and of institutional capacity.

Despite these concerns, however, many comments centered on reasons to liberalize designation.

- *Student-Focused:* respondents noted that the first job of the BC Transfer Guide should be to provide information for students and that expanding that information beyond the current restricted designations should be a priority.
- *System parity/institutional autonomy:* some comments related to a perception that it is high time the organization of the Guide reflected the changing nature of the BC post-secondary system.

Some of the comments received in this section relate to the need for BCCAT to support institutions in whatever they wish to do with regard to designation rather than to try to control the process. However, most comments appeared to express the desire to have BCCAT continue to play a gatekeeper role – to establish criteria and to "maintain control."

**B. <u>Annual Meeting of Articulation Chairs and System Liaison Persons</u>**

Participants were asked to discuss four questions.

*1. What assurances are reasonable for BCCAT to request? Draft some suggestions.*

We did not receive much helpful comment, although participants did agree that each institution should undertake to designate whatever staff resources were required to maintain agreements.

*2. What are the workload implications for faculty at a sending institution that becomes a receiving institution also? What should institutions know about these before they add an additional designation?*

Discussion on this question centred on the need to clarify what work was expected of faculty versus staff. All three tables espoused the use of triangulation as an efficient method to jump start the process. Participants also pointed out that many faculty are assessing courses now on a case-by-case basis, and that formal articulation may decrease workload in the long run.

*3. At the moment, a private institution with consent to offer a baccalaureate degree is added to the BC Transfer Guide as a receiving institution only. A private institution with consent to offer an associate degree is added as a sending institution only. If each institution is free to add a sending or receiving designation, what are the implications of that for public/private articulation?*

Responses indicated that articulation requests from private institutions would be "scrutinized more closely" and greeted with "skepticism."

*4. Red, green or amber?*

Two groups assigned a green light to Issue 1, while a third assigned an amber light because of the inclusion of the private institution question.

## C. Annual Meeting of Institutional Contact Persons

We asked the ICPs to advise us, if institutions were to present a case for re-designation, what the elements of such a case should be. While some participants indicated that volume of transfer might be important, others insisted that institutions should decide for themselves, and work out between themselves, when it would make sense to articulate. Posting of already constructed internal transfer tables was cited as a possible starting point.

Participants were unsure what assurances BCCAT might seek, citing that few administrators at individual institutions had real understanding as to the costs of expanding and maintaining the institution's articulation activity. They felt that BCCAT might be most helpful in providing information on costs and on exemplary practices and in educating faculty in the course evaluation process.

## D. Meeting of Academic and Career/Technical Deans' Group

One further occasion for consultation was utilized to garner advice on this issue – the May 2006 meeting of the BC College and University College Academic and Career/Technical Deans' Group, at Kwantlen University College. Participants were asked to discuss the question of whether BCCAT should stand aside and allow a free-market approach to designation, or should exercise management and oversight. While the Deans agreed with lifting designation restrictions, they were unanimous in their advice that BCCAT must retain a management function. The BC Transfer System, they said, is the envy of most Canadian provinces, and this is in large part owing to the fact that it is a well managed system. Best practices have been established and BCCAT has done an excellent job in providing oversight, quality control, and coordination. The Deans pointed out that institutional capacity may be the most important determinant of an institution's ability to convert to a receiving institution, citing, for example, that some psychology departments had fifty members, while others had one or two. They also expressed concern over extending to private institutions the ability to self-designate.

## E. Recommendations for Consideration

It is clear that institutions are united in the opinion that BCCAT must move to liberalize the designation process. The question, therefore, arises: Should we simply lift the current restrictions on designations and institute a free-market approach to articulation, or should we rather plan a managed transition to a new transfer environment? Comments in the online survey, and advice received at the face-to-face meetings indicate a desire and a need for BCCAT to continue to administrate and coordinate the process. In addition, some issues require clarification. For example, the fact that every institution can become a receiving institution does not imply that every other institution must play the role of sending institution.

Important questions remain about the implications of removing designation restrictions, and the processes involved.

- Each designation, sending and receiving, carries with it significant obligations and responsibilities which stretch from the registrar's area to faculty offices: are these roles and responsibilities clearly understood at each institution, including the resource allocations necessary to fulfill them?
- What is the impact on *other* institutions of a redesignation decision made at a single institution?
- Is it reasonable to suggest that institutions can decide to send to, or receive from, only certain other institutions, rather than enter into universal articulations?
- Is it reasonable to contemplate articulating only in certain programs or disciplines?
- What were the experiences of the university colleges when they moved from being sending institutions only to being both sending institutions and receiving institutions, and what can we learn from those experiences?
- To what extent will allowing all institutions to send and receive obviate any incentive to contemplate multilateral transfer as an alternative approach to organising information in the BC Transfer Guide?
- Will lifting the designation restrictions democratise the system by ridding it of the current perceived institutional hierarchy which privileges receiving institutions over sending institutions? Will it enhance the parity of esteem which is an ideal for the transfer environment?

Bearing in mind these questions, we have formulated draft recommendations.

**Recommendation 1.1:**

*That BCCAT staff develop a paper that explores fully the implication of lifting current designation restrictions. This paper will:*

- *provide an outline of the tasks, roles and responsibilities involved in each designation;*
- *examine the effect on other institutions, on BCCAT and on the system as a whole, of one institution's decision to add a designation, as well as of multiple institutions' decisions;*
- *consider a potential set of criteria for applying for redesignation, such as the institution's rationale for its designation request, evidence of student transfer numbers, provision of information about transfer options, etc;*
- *propose a possible application process, which may include, for example, a requirement for the institution to commit to providing the resources needed to support the designation functions;*
- *outline options for action once a decision has been made by a) sending institutions and b) receiving institutions. Options should adhere to best practice and efficient processes, and may include recommendations such as that all institutions adding the receiving institution designation begin the process of constructing their transfer tables by using existing databases and a process of triangulation, prior to soliciting course-to-course articulations from sending institutions.*

**Recommendation 1.2:**

*That staff seek input from system groups in the development of this paper and in its draft recommendations.*

**Recommendation 1.3:**

*That the TAC discuss this paper and forward their recommendations to Council.*

## ISSUE 2: Regional Transfer Guides and Transfer Protocols

Questions in this section of the survey were designed to help BCCAT understand whether there were more efficient ways of providing transfer information than multiple bilateral course-to-course agreements, especially where few student are transferring.

Recent data compiled by the Central Data Warehouse (CDW) in collaboration with the TUPC show evidence of a strong geographical influence on student movement. Students in the North, for example, are more likely to transfer to UNBC, while students in the Lower Mainland appear to move easily between colleges and universities in the greater metropolitan region.

We do not know the degree to which the large numbers of students we observe moving between Lower Mainland institutions are the result of aimless "swirling," "purposeful migration" or some mix of both. A recent report from the US Department of Education, in which this distinction is made, asserts that "Formal transfer from a community college to a four-year college and formal transfer from one four-year college to another were positively associated with degree completion, but wandering from one school to another was not."[3] We are not sure if a student who wanders from Kwantlen to Douglas to Capilano, picking up credits, needs transfer information in the same way as does a student who is transferring to Capilano with the intention of pursuing a Capilano credential.

Nevertheless, we can assume that many students are, in fact, migrating purposefully from one college to another. Those students currently have little access to information about how their credits will transfer, since colleges are designated as sending institutions. Our question asked if a regional transfer guide could provide that kind of information, given that most students are not leaving their region.

### A. Consultation Responses

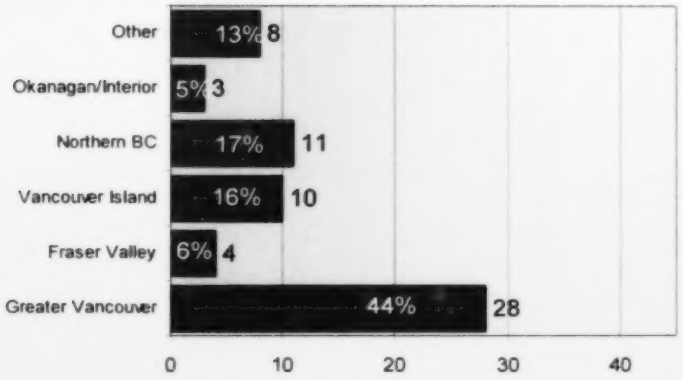
| Question 4: Should BCCAT encourage the development of regional transfer guides, in which all institutions in a given region could request designation as both sending and receiving institutions? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 64 | 45% |
| No | 77 | 55% |
| **Total** | **141** | **100%** |

Responses to Question 4 provide evidence that respondents are acutely aware that some forms of articulation are more advantages than others. In this case, basing a decision on evidence (for example, deciding to implement regional transfer guides because of strong evidence of regional mobility) is not enough: rather, the whole context of articulation and transfer needs to be understood. 55% of respondents answered no to this question.

Comments received on the topic of regional transfer guides indicated that regional transfer guides may not be advantageous for students, and would only be acceptable as supplemental to the provincial transfer guide, not as a substitute for it.

[3] The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion from High School Through College
Available at: http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/toolboxrevisit/index.html

**Question 5: Which region might be the best place to start, on a pilot basis, the approach described in Question 4?**



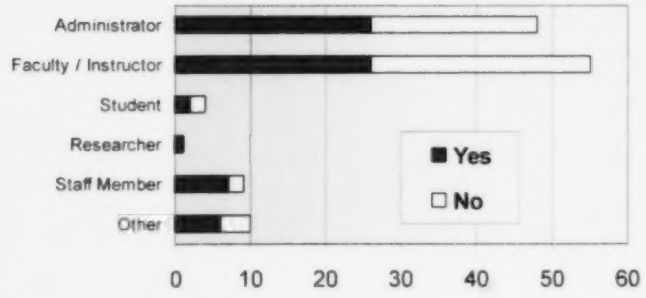

If a pilot were to be attempted, Greater Vancouver was seen as the best candidate.

| Question 6: Should institutions receiving few transfer students be encouraged to sign transfer protocols or guarantees, rather than negotiate multiple articulation agreements? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 65 | 52% |
| No | 59 | 48% |
| **Total** | **124** | **100%** |

Fifty-two percent of respondents indicated yes to this question, and we received 94 individual comments, with a huge variety of opinions, revealing deep divisions among respondents.

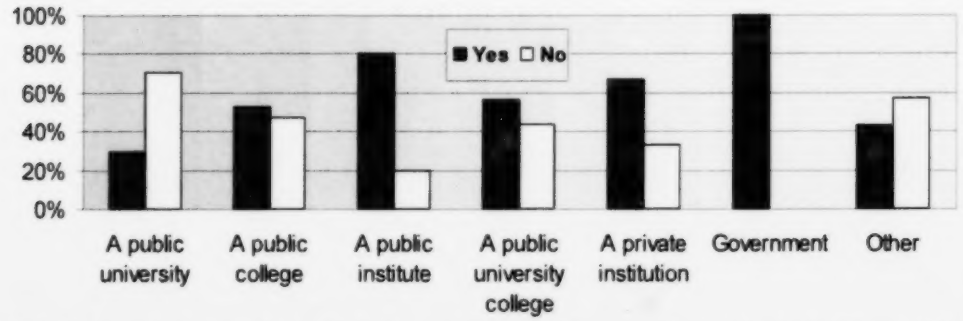
Faculty and administrators were evenly divided on this question. Participants who identified themselves as staff were more inclined to say yes than either administrators or faculty. Since those designated as staff are likely to work in the registration or admission area, or as advisors, we can speculate that staff may have a different understanding of what is involved in dealing with students on a case-by-case basis than other groups have.

**Question 6: Should institutions receiving few transfer students be encouraged to sign transfer protocols or guarantees, rather than negotiate multiple articulation agreements?**



Respondents from public universities were twice as likely to say no to protocols, whereas those from institutes and from private institutions were twice as likely to say yes.

**Question 6: Should institutions receiving few transfer students be encouraged to sign transfer protocols or guarantees, rather than negotiate multiple articulation agreements?**




As with Question 4, analysis of comments revealed concerns around whether protocols advantage or disadvantage students, and whether they introduce efficiencies into the articulation process.

- *Student-Focussed:* Those respondents who focussed on what is best for students in their comments almost universally rejected the notion that protocols might be helpful. While one respondent labelled it a "second class arrangement" many others pointed out that students needed to know exactly how their credits would transfer and that multiple articulation agreements are the most precise and appropriate for our current transfer environment.
- *Workload/Resources/Efficiency Focussed:* Many respondents agreed that protocols have the potential to "significantly lower the administrative burden," and "simplify the process" especially where few students are transferring. Others disagreed and labelled the process of signing protocols "labour intensive," and "cumbersome, costly and time consuming."
- *Other comments:* Other comments focussed on whether or not articulation-based transfer and protocols might be used in harmony, whether saddling small institutions with protocols created a two-tier system, and raised a concern that protocols (which guarantee case-by-case assignment of transfer credit) might not safeguard quality of coursework in the way that articulation-based transfer currently does.

Even though a slight majority answered yes to transfer protocols, the comments we received reflected a cautious, even nervous, reaction to the idea of implementing them.

## B. Annual Meeting of Articulation Chairs and System Liaison Persons

Participants were asked to discuss and comment on four statements, two concerning regional transfer guides and two more concerning transfer protocols:

1. *Lower Mainland institutions should articulate on a course-to-course basis with other Lower Mainland institutions, but sign transfer protocols with other institutions from whom they are unlikely to receive many students.*
2. *Institutions in other regions should also articulate most closely within their region.*

It was stressed that regional transfer guides can be an adjunct to but not a substitute for province-wide articulation.

3. *Transfer protocols are a good idea – they provide assurances of transfer without all the work of course-to-course articulation.*
4. *Transfer protocols are a bad idea – students need to know what credit they will receive.*

One table group pointed out, in regard to transfer protocols, that students will not register in courses that are not formally articulated. In sum, participants agreed that a transfer protocol is better than nothing, but falls far short of the ideal – specific course-to-course transfer.

This issue received an amber light from table groups, with comments reflecting slightly more openness to the idea of regional transfer guides than to the idea of transfer protocols

### C. Annual Meeting of Institutional Contact Persons

Like Articulation Chairs and SLPs, ICPs stressed that regional transfer guides could enhance but not replace the current province-wide nature of the BC Transfer Guide. They particularly expressed concern that any regionalization of transfer information would be disadvantageous to smaller institutions or those outside the Lower Mainland. Using regional filters on the online Guide was seen as a good idea, since they agreed that there are "natural groupings" of institutions in the Guide. This group felt that transfer protocols are a "bad idea" since students need to know what credit they will receive. Protocols should be at the option of the sending institution only.

### D. Recommendations for Consideration

**Recommendation 2.1:**

*That BCCAT investigate implementing a search-by-region mechanism as an enhancement to BC Transfer Guide.*

**Recommendation 2.2:**

*That BCCAT not pursue, at this time, any form of regionally-limited articulation.*

**Recommendation 2.3:**

*That BCCAT continue to offer to facilitate transfer protocols where institutions request it, or where such a protocol enables transfer that would not occur in any other way, but that we otherwise not promote actively the use of transfer protocols as an alternative to course-to-course articulation for public institutions.*

## ISSUE 3: Conversion of Case-by-Case Transfer to Articulation-Based Transfer

The questions in this section were designed to elicit advice on how to provide information not currently available in the BC Transfer Guide.

### A. Consultation Responses

| Question 7: What transfer, currently conducted through case-by-case assessment would be helpful to students if converted to articulation-based transfer? (multiple selections allowed) | | |
|---|---|---|
| University to University | 74 | 56% |
| Transfer to BCIT | 70 | 53% |
| College to College | 89 | 67% |
| University College to College | 73 | 55% |
| Transfer in more Applied or Vocational Programs | 62 | 47% |
| Third and Fourth Year Course-to-Course Articulations | 65 | 49% |
| Other | 37 | 28% |

Respondents, understandably, felt that all the options presented were important. The option most frequently chosen was college to college (67%), perhaps a reflection of the predominance of college respondents.

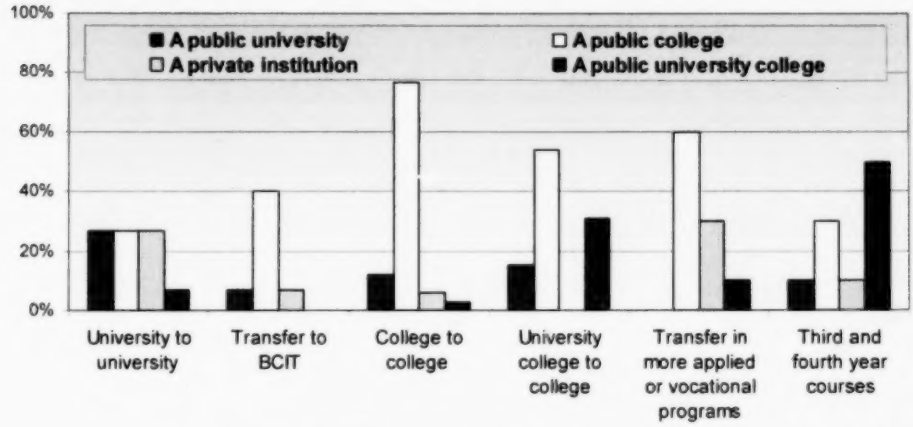
Information about university to university transfer is one of the most frequent requests that the Transfer Guide Coordinator receives. Therefore, it is not surprising that this came next at 56%, followed by university college to college at 55%, and transfer to BCIT at 53%.

As it was anticipated that respondents might well choose to check multiple answers, in a follow up question we sought more specific advice. In Question 8, respondents were allowed to select only one item, and as such, this question functioned to rank order the choices. Once again, the college to college option received most votes.

| Question 8: Given the time and costs required to convert to articulation based transfer, what information should be made available first? | | |
|---|---|---|
| University to University | 18 | 14% |
| Transfer to BCIT | 14 | 11% |
| College to College | 38 | 29% |
| University College to College | 13 | 10% |
| Transfer in more Applied or Vocational Programs | 13 | 10% |
| Third and Fourth Year Course-to-Course Articulations | 12 | 9% |
| Other | 23 | 18% |
| **Total** | **131** | **100%** |

In order to assess who was selecting which options, the results for Question 8 were compared with the institutional-affiliation of respondents described in Question 21.

**Question 8: Given the time and costs required to convert to articulation-based transfer, what information should be made available first?**




In some instances, institutional affiliation correlates with respondents' ranking of transfer information. Thus, those who chose college to college as high priority are more likely to be from a college, while those who chose third and fourth year courses are more likely to be from a university college. However, respondents from universities and private institutions appear to be less influenced by their institutional affiliation. It is also possible that university respondents are simply not in favour of university to university transfer.

Given the perceived over-influence of institutional affiliation, it may be that the issue of converting from case-by-case assessment to articulation-based transfer is best approached through other means. For example, BCCAT needs to understand the major directions in which students move without benefit of course-to-course transfer information. The CDW data indicates that the largest volume of such transfer is most likely transfer to BCIT. However, we have no information on whether students experience any difficulties with transfer to BCIT, whether they are satisfied with the transfer credit they receive, or whether, due to the specialised nature of BCIT programs, it is even possible to negotiate course-to-course transfer for many courses. Likewise, we know that many students each year transfer between universities in BC. However, apart from the fact that we know that the Transfer Guide Coordinator receives many queries about this kind of transfer, we do not know whether the current use of case-by case assessment for such transfer is problematic. It may be possible to gather more precise information about the scope of transfer to BCIT, and of university-to-university transfer through the examination of data sets, but the assessment of students' experiences will involve more complex analysis, and carefully constructed survey instruments.

If BCCAT decides to lift the current restrictions on designation, the transfer guide will, over time, contain many college to college and university college to college course-to-course articulations. Recommendations 1.1 to 1.3 will, therefore, address the need for action for those institutions. We do not know, however, if BCIT will choose to become a receiving institution or if universities will be interested in articulating among each other.

With regard to upper division (third and fourth year) course articulations, the universities have told us in the past that they are unwilling to engage in this activity. They do not believe that the volume of students transferring at that level justifies the resources necessary to establish and maintain articulation agreements for upper division courses. The university colleges, on the other hand, have expressed a desire to extend articulation to third and fourth year courses, possibly based on more flexible residency requirements and transfer credit policies. Any attempt, therefore, to extend articulation to third and fourth year courses will likely be welcomed by the university colleges, but not by the universities.

**Question 9: What suggestions, other than your responses above, do you have for cost-effective solutions to providing transfer information not currently recorded in the BC Transfer Guide?**

Of the 50 responses received to this question, some re-iterated the choices made in response to questions 7 and 8, or provided rationale for those choices. Several respondents indicated that they supported the multilateral transfer model, and felt it would be a good means of providing transfer information. Others felt that flexible pre-majors, block transfer agreements, common learning outcomes, or use of triangulation may be useful developments.

Many other thoughtful comments and excellent suggestions received in response to this question are included and considered in the section of this report labeled *Priorities, Suggestions and Advice*.

## D. Recommendations for Consideration

**Recommendation 3.1:**

*That BCCAT inform receiving institutions that, at their request, we will facilitate the articulation of third and fourth year courses in the BC Transfer Guide, using the Transfer Credit Evaluation System. There should be no obligation on any institution, sending or receiving, to submit or evaluate third and/or fourth year courses for transfer credit.*

**Recommendation 3.2:**

*That BCCAT investigate the feasibility of exploring with BCIT a) the scope of student transfer to and from BCIT and b) the experiences of students who transfer to and from BCIT. These projects can be planned for 2007-08, or as resources become available, and should be based on the willingness of BCIT to engage in such investigation.*

**Recommendation 3.3:**

*That BCCAT investigate the feasibility of exploring with UBC and SFU a) the scope of students transferring between the two universities and b) the experience of students with their transfer. These projects can be planned for 2007-08, or as resources become available, and should be based on the willingness of UBC and SFU to engage in such investigation.*

## ISSUE 4: Recording of Public/Private Articulation Agreements

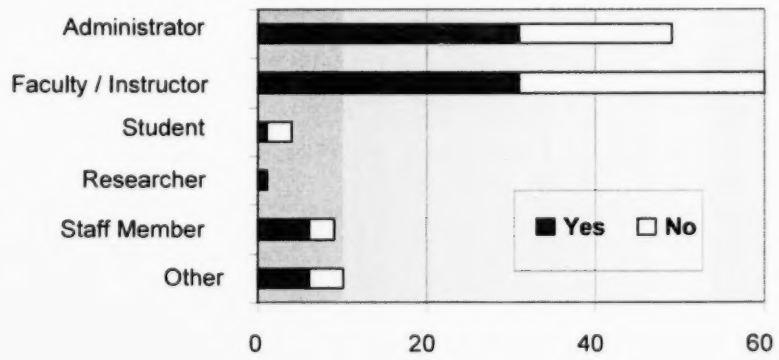
BCCAT's mandate includes responsibility for facilitating public-private transfer. While there is now a policy in place whereby private institutions with approved degrees can request articulation within the BC Transfer System, no formal bridges exist for transfer from non-degree private colleges. Nevertheless, some institutions do articulate, and BCCAT has received inquiries about the possibilities of recording such agreements in the Guide. This question was designed to assess the openness of those inside the Transfer System to such an arrangement as well as to seek the opinions of those outside the system.

### A. Consultation Responses

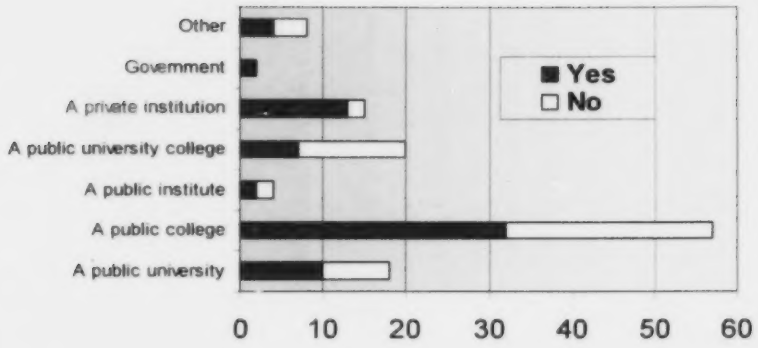
As evidenced by the number of respondents providing comments on this question (130 responses, 96 comments), this was the most controversial question asked in the survey.

| Question 12: Should we include articulation agreements with private non-member institutions in the BC Transfer Guide, at the request of the receiving institution, provided that the receiving institution is a member of the BC Transfer System? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 73 | 56% |
| No | 57 | 44% |
| **Total** | **130** | **100%** |

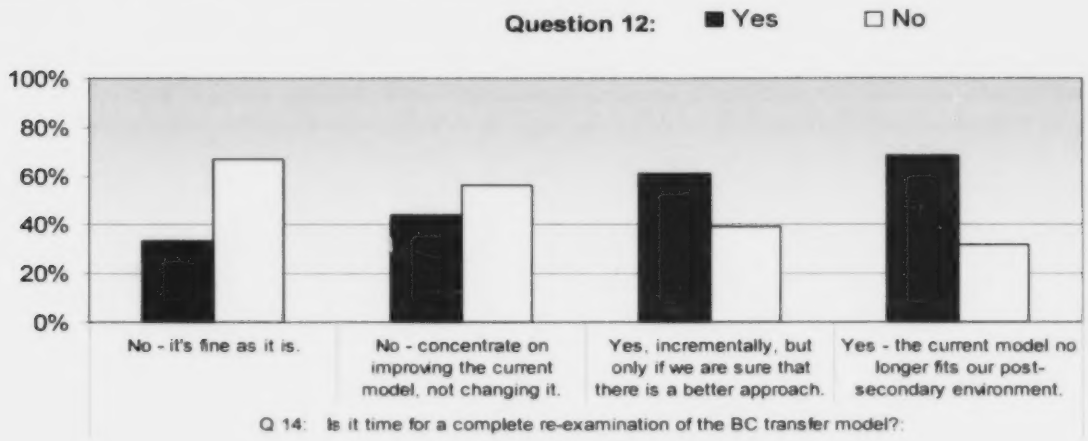
Administrators and staff were significantly more likely to answer yes to Question 12 than were faculty (who were close to evenly divided). Three of four student respondents answered no.




Respondents from public universities and colleges were somewhat more likely to say yes (59%), although the formal responses from TUPC and CUFA-BC were no votes. 57% of colleges said yes, while university colleges were more likely to say no (65%). Predictably, 87% of those associated with private institutions said yes.




Respondents who answered yes to Question 12, about private institutions, were also more likely to choose the "more change" options on Question 14.


Question 12:
Yes
No
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
No - it's fine as it is.
No - concentrate on improving the current model, not changing it.
Yes, incrementally, but only if we are sure that there is a better approach.
Yes - the current model no longer fits our post-secondary environment.
Q 14: Is it time for a complete re-examination of the BC transfer model?

While a small majority (56%) answered yes to Question 12, an analysis of the comments offered by respondents to this question is illuminating, since it may reveal the depths to which respondents (who are, for the most part, from the BC Transfer System and from public institutions) are conflicted about the question of articulation with private institutions. For every comment that concentrated on the need to serve students by providing this information, there was another that expressed concern about the quality of private institutions. Some respondents voiced both sides of the debate: "We should be encouraging more possibilities for students, not keeping doors closed for some academic snobbery reasons. I must emphasise, though, that this is only okay as long as strict quality assessment methods are applied consistently and rigorously."

- *Student Focussed:* Respondents who answered yes were more inclined to provide comments focussing on the needs of students for transfer information. Providing this information was seen to be "in the best interests of students," which should be the rationale rather than "the interests of institutions." A response for the PCTIA reminded us that "The raison d'etre for BCCAT is 'facilitating student mobility'...The point of access to degree-level education should not be an impediment." An institutional response stated that "Including articulation agreements with

privates will facilitate easy movement of students and increase access." A private institution pointed out that articulation "is about giving students access to info they need in order to get credit for their learning."

- *Quality Control:* Some respondents alluded to previous "bad experiences" with private institutions and express the concern that their quality is "an ongoing and significant problem." Others worried that articulating with private institutions confers "an impression of legitimacy to their course offerings that is not deserved." Some questioned whether individual institutions have the resources or expertise to undertake a thorough quality assessment of a private institution, and several suggested that only some centralised provincial process would be considered legitimate. The CFS response is based on a concern that including private institution agreements would "undermine the quality of the public post-secondary education system in BC." In CUFA-BC's words, "Formal membership in the BC Transfer System is one part of the overall post-secondary quality control system." What is striking in the quality-focussed comments is that few acknowledge that some private institutions deliver good programs. All in all, it seems clear that private institutions in BC appear to have a major problem with how they are perceived by the public post-secondary system. This impression is underscored by the use of phrases such as "don't believe," "do not trust" and "am not convinced."
- *Workload/Efficiency:* Those comments that focus on this area are universally slanted to the view that the work involved in articulating with private institutions would be "time consuming" and not "worthwhile." There are a couple of suggestions regarding charging private institutions for the work involved.
- *Competition:* Some comments acknowledge the presence of private institutions as "the new reality" and even suggest that competition may be "good for the system." However, other comments have more of an air of resignation: "will have to deal with it eventually." One or two respondents refer to the need not to "discriminate" against private institutions or their students.
- *Institutional Autonomy/Parity:* All institutions, as autonomous entities, must retain the right to accept or reject credits from private institutions.
- *Evidence-Based Action:* Many comments focus on the need to be convinced that there is a problem. CUFA-BC states: "there has been no compelling evidence presented to suggest that student flows in these cases are sufficiently large to meet our test of BCCAT focusing on providing broadly applicable solutions to transfer problems." The Selkirk Student Association points to the CISO survey as evidence that few students appear to move from private to public institutions. Given the lack of information about the volume of students potentially benefiting from much effort in this area, some respondents doubt that this should be a high priority item at this time.

**B. <u>Annual Meeting of Articulation Chairs and System Liaison Persons</u>**

Participants were asked to discuss three questions:

1. *What concerns do you have about the BC Transfer Guide recording such agreements?*

Similar expressions of concern about the quality of private institutions surfaced, as well as their ability to deliver quality programs in a predictable and long-term timeframe. Participants were uncertain of the capacity of individual institutions to conduct thorough quality assessments, and also felt that once a private institution is in the Guide, it is difficult for another public institution to refuse to articulate.

2. *What concerns do you have about the BC Transfer Guide not recording such agreements?*

Besides a general agreement that not to record such agreements could limit student mobility (referred to by one group as a "glass ceiling"), including that of international students, one group mused that limiting such access for private institutions could lead to the stagnation of the transfer system.

3. *What caveats or conditions would you suggest be placed on the recording of such agreements?*

The groups suggested that these agreements be clearly identified as different, by using asterisks, or by locating them in a separate section of the Transfer Guide. BCCAT should state a clear expectation that the quality review be rigorous, and that the private institution should be stable and able to sustain their part in the agreement, and should cover all costs involved.

4. *Red, green or amber?*

This issue overall got an amber light, with some individuals voting for green, and nobody opting for red.

### C. Annual Meeting of Institutional Contact Persons

The ICPs discussing this issue felt that providing information on public/private articulation agreements could benefit students and therefore should be contemplated. However, they were concerned that such agreements should be understood to be between signatory institutions and that triangulation with (or extension of the agreement to) other institutions was not to be sought, since they foresaw pressure from private institutions to do so. They also expressed the concern that the administration of such agreements could be "overwhelming" and that care must be taken with any updating and renewal processes and with the consistency of recording. The issue was assigned an amber light.

### E. Recommendations for Consideration

**Recommendation 4.1:**

*That BCCAT attempt to gather information about the number of students attending private institutions, and about the potential demand for private/public transfer.*

**Recommendation 4.2:**

*That BCCAT staff formulates an issues paper, for discussion by the TAC and Council, on recording private/public articulation agreements in the BC Transfer Guide, based on the advice received in this consultation. The paper would include possible draft policy options for the circumstances under which such agreements would be recorded, and how they would be represented in the BC Transfer Guide.*

**Recommendation 4.3:**

*That BCCAT continue to examine a more comprehensive approach to the inclusion of private institutions in the BC Transfer System.*

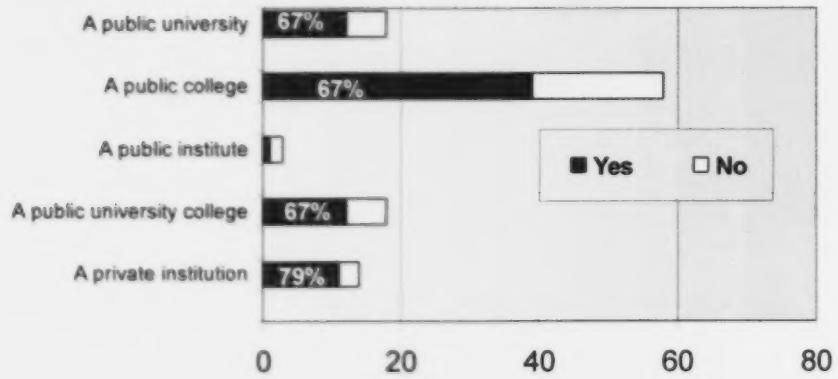
## ISSUE 5: Recording Out-of-Province Articulation Agreements

BCCAT's Transfer Guide Coordinator estimates that over half of the questions from students concern out-of-province transfer. We know that many students in BC take courses from Athabasca University, which has in the past applied to become a member of the BC Transfer System, as well as increasingly from institutions offering online courses and programs. Finally, some colleges in eastern BC articulate with Alberta institutions. For these reasons we wished to garner advice from the system regarding the desirability and the feasibility of recording articulation agreement with out-of-province institutions.

### A. Consultation Responses

| Question 13: Should we consider justifiable exceptions to the policy of limiting transfer information to institutions within BC? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 83 | 66% |
| No | 42 | 34% |
| **Total** | **125** | **100%** |

In reviewing who provided a yes response to this question, there are no real differences between faculty and administrators – about two thirds of both groups said yes. Respondents from private institutions were more likely to say yes (79%) than those from public institutions (67%).




The sub-question asked: *If yes, what criteria might be used to describe a justifiable exception?* Therefore, comments largely addressed the issue of criteria although other types of comments were noted as well:

- *Student Focussed:* Many comments referenced Alberta as an obvious transfer partner to BC. Some mentioned Athabasca University specifically, as providing online courses for BC students, while others commented on the growth of online courses in general as evidence of the breakdown of "arbitrary geographical lines."

- *Evidence-based:* Respondents suggested that any exception should be based on traffic: phrases used include "significant level of student movement," "reasonable volume," "if number of transfers warrant," and "frequently used institutions." Only two specific threshold suggestions were made: "more than 20" and "perhaps 100."
- *Workload/Efficiency: A* few respondents pointed out the obvious workload implications. A couple suggested using a block transfer approach, or formulating principles rather than articulation agreements.
- *Quality Control:* Some comments specified the need for rigorous quality control and for any policy to be limited to "accredited" institutions. CUFA-BC cautioned us that "... such inclusion not be used as a means for BC based institutions that have partnership agreements with degree-granting institutions outside the province to circumvent the usual BC process for articulation."
- *Other:* One of the few dissenting voices points to the precedent issue: "The problem with this suggestion is: where do you draw the line? Other provinces? Other countries? Any exception could lead to a huge amount of additional information being added to the guide. I appreciate that out-of-province students have difficulties assessing transferability, but I don't believe overwhelming the system, possibly at the expense of diverting resources away from the BC-based information, is a feasible alternative."

### B. Annual Meeting of Articulation Chairs and System Liaison Persons

Participants were asked to discuss three questions:

1. *What might constitute a justifiable exception?*

   Once again, comments mainly revolved around the volume of student traffic. Participants felt that exceptions should only be made for public institutions and the institutions must present a case for inclusion.

2. *Should we consider admitting Athabasca University to membership in the BC Transfer System, based on the large volume of BC students taking course through Athabasca University?*

   Participants suggested that Athabasca University might be treated as a pilot or "test case."

3. *Does this set a dangerous precedent? If we say yes to non-BC institutions, who do we say no to?*

   Participants agreed that it was appropriate to proceed with great caution. Getting the definition of a justifiable exception right, would be the best first step.

4. *Red, green or amber?*

   One group chose green, one chose amber, and one chose "a cross between the two."

### C. Annual Meeting of Institutional Contact Persons

Both groups of ICPs discussing this issue were dubious as to its merits and felt it could be a drain on resources, thus "endangering the core" functions of the BC Transfer System. While one group was open to the idea of admitting Athabasca University on the basis of the volume of student transfers, the other was adamantly opposed to any expansion beyond the BC border, seeing it as a dangerous precedent. Overall, this item got a red light from the ICPs.

### D. Recommendations for Consideration

**Recommendation 5.1:**

*That BCCAT staff prepare a document for discussion at the TAC and Council that outlines the conditions under which Council would entertain an application from an out-of-province institution that might apply for inclusion in the BC Transfer System.*

---

## ISSUE 6: Developing More Program Transfer Information and Innovative Transfer Models

These questions were intended to gauge the level of support for BCCAT's current Transfer Innovations initiatives, in order to assess whether they truly have the potential to provide useful additional information for transfer students. BCCAT has expended considerable resources to date on these initiatives: $339,000 as of March 2006, with 40 projects completed.

BCCAT has asserted for many years that the pre-major (i.e. the courses required in first and second year to be accepted into the major) is the single most problematic area for transfer students in academic programs. Requirements for most majors are not standard across institutions. Therefore, transfer students who wish to have some choice in the receiving institution they eventually attend experience considerable difficulty acquiring the courses needed to satisfy numerous pre-major requirements. Furthermore, sending institutions cannot always offer the right mix of pre-requisites to give their students the maximum number of transfer options. Further divergence of requirements, a frequent occurrence in the system, compounds the problem.

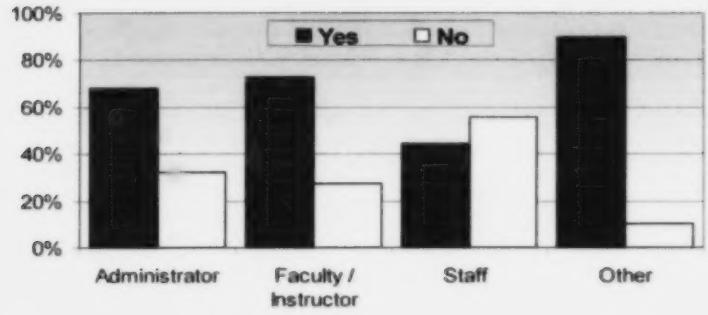
The Flexible Pre-Major (FPM) offers a solution: an articulation committee proposes a set of flexible courses, deliverable by all sending institutions and acceptable to all receiving institutions in lieu of their own requirements. So far, the only successfully completed FPM is in Music, although projects are currently underway in Math, Anthropology and Sociology, and English.

### A. Consultation Responses

71% of respondents answered yes to Question 10, marking it as the most decisive response we received after Question 1.

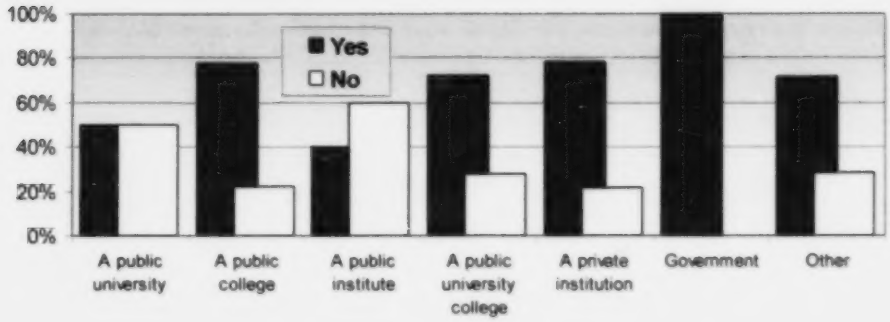
| Question 10: Should BCCAT be encouraging and providing support for more Flexible Pre-Major projects in academic disciplines? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 89 | 71% |
| No | 36 | 29% |
| **Total** | **125** | **100%** |

**Question 10: Should BCCAT be encouraging and providing support for more Flexible Pre-Major projects in academic disciplines?**




Respondents from public colleges and university colleges were more likely to say yes to this question (78% and 72%) than were respondents from public universities (50%). Although only four responses were received from students or student groups, they are all supportive of FPMs. Respondents from institutes (n=4) appear to be unsupportive.

**Question 10: Should BCCAT be encouraging and providing support for more Flexible Pre-Major projects in academic disciplines?**




Most significantly, however, neither the CUFA-BC nor TUPC response is supportive of FPMs, asserting that they are not "the best use of BCCAT's resources" and that furthermore they can be "very difficult to implement and require considerable time and effort." The UVic response, although somewhat positive, was cautious. This contrasts sharply with college responses, which were supportive of the idea of a FPM. One respondent captured the dilemma of conflicting views well: "Likely all disciplines could benefit from this pre-major project, but I suspect it will be difficult to get UBC, SFU, UVic to agree on a common first two years, let alone trying to get UNBC and the University Colleges on board." He or she went on to suggest, "Would it be possible to learn of the successes (and struggles to become successful) that Music had and Sociology/Anthropology, Mathematics, and English are having?"

This – the colleges are enthusiastic about FPMs while the universities are not - poses a perplexing question regarding what recommendation to make, since FPMs require the collaborative efforts and goodwill of both sectors. While we are recommending that we continue to encourage articulation committees to apply for FPM projects, we must be alive to the reality that these projects are sometimes

uphill battles. Responses also indicated some confusion over exactly what an RFP involves; indicating that we need to communicate clearly what is and is not covered by the concept.

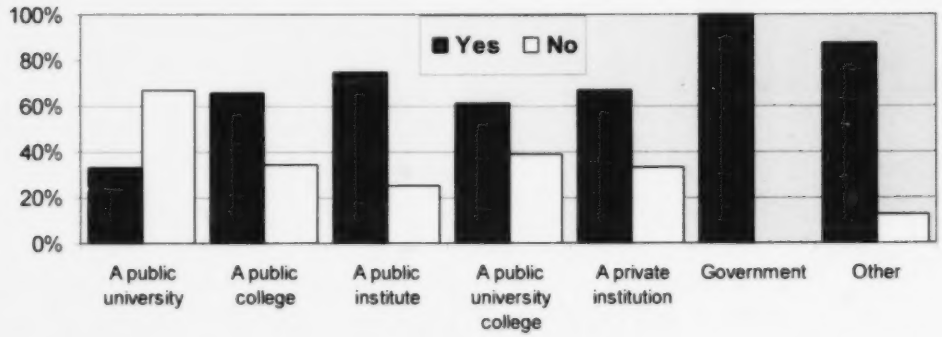
Respondents were also offered the opportunity to suggest which disciplines might be suitable for and/or open to this approach. A wide variety of suggestions were received, with many respondents feeling that any academic discipline is potentially suitable, while some suggested that popular subjects, in which many students transfer, should receive priority.

BCCAT has encouraged the development of program specific transfer information through the provision of Transfer Innovations grants. As a result that there are now sixteen transfer guides for career and applied programs provided in the Program Transfer section of the BC Transfer Guide (http://www.bctransferguide.ca/program) while block transfer agreements have also been developed in other areas.

| Question 11: Do we need more program-specific transfer information? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 77 | 63% |
| No | 46 | 37% |
| **Total** | **123** | **100%** |

Respondents from colleges, institutes and university colleges were significantly more likely to answer yes to this question, while respondents from universities were twice as likely to answer no. It is perhaps understandable that universities are not engaged in this issue, since the question really relates to career programs, which have not traditionally been the focus of the BC Transfer Guide.

**Question 11: Do we need more program-specific transfer information?**




When asked what critical programs we should be pursuing, respondents offered a wide variety of suggestions with the most frequently cited being in Business, Education, Nursing, Tourism, Computing and Human Services.

Respondents to *both* Questions 10 and 11 reminded us that expanding the information available to students is "resource intensive." One respondent pointed out that "BCCAT should realise, though, that simply providing money for expenses is not enough - this is work most properly done by faculty, and I (in common with most faculty) already work 60-70 hour weeks. What is needed is chunks of leave

time." Another common theme was the role BCCAT should play – facilitative rather than directive. As CUFA-BC put it, "We are not opposed to BCCAT helping to facilitate different models of transfer, but these initiatives must come from the institutions and be primarily supported by the institutions." The response from AVED is in agreement with this: "it is not the role of BCCAT to lead on academic policy such as pre-requisites for a major."

**B: Recommendations for Consideration**

**Recommendation 6.1:**

*That BCCAT continue to provide funding and support to articulation committees and other groups that wish to pursue projects to improve transfer in specific disciplines, whether in academic or career areas.*

**Recommendation 6.2**

*That priority for funding should be given to projects that hold the promise of solving transfer difficulties in high-traffic disciplines, such as Flexible Pre-Major or multilateral transfer guide projects, and that BCCAT makes every effort to communicate clearly what such projects involve.*

---

## ISSUE 7: Is it time for a complete re-examination of the BC Transfer Model?

This section covers a series of linked questions, all of which were intended to solicit advice on the viability of our current model of transfer, that is, the model which is predicated on the designation of institutions as sending and/or receiving institutions, and on multiple bi-lateral agreements for discrete courses. The consultation paper presented several alternates for consideration, but only one was described in detail – that of multilateral transfer. The multilateral transfer model is currently used in the following transfer guides:

- Business Management Transfer Guide: www.bctransferguide.ca/business/
- Adult Basic Education Transfer Guide: www.bctransferguide.ca/program/abe/abeguide.cfm
- the ESL Articulation Handbook: www.aved.gov.bc.ca/esl/handbook/handbook06.pdf
- the Early Childhood Education Course-to-Course Transfer matrix: www.bctransferguide.ca/program/ece/course.cfm

In the US, this model has been used in many states, in combination with a common course numbering system, to organise state-wide articulation agreements centring on a General Education Core Curriculum.

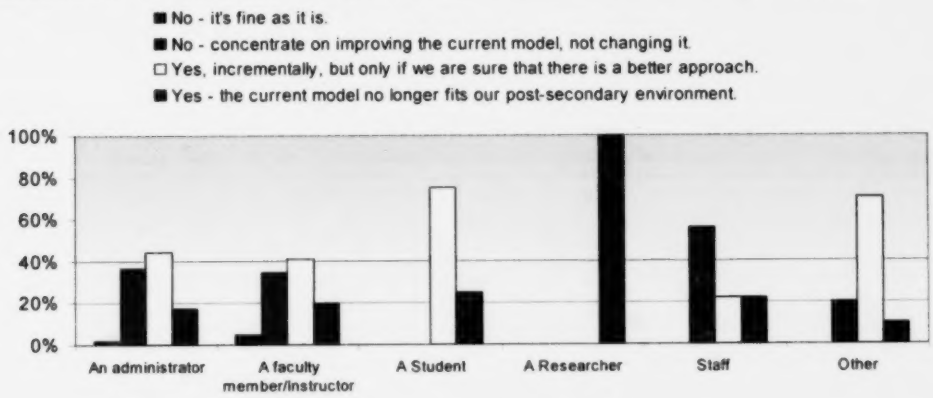
**A. Consultation Responses**

With regard to Question 14, 38% of respondents chose one of the no options, while 62% chose one of the yes options. However, the middle two answers, both of which represent soft options for change (*improve rather than change* and *only change if we're sure it's better*) garnered 81% of the votes between them. Only 2% of respondents felt that things were fine as is, while 17% indicated that they had lost faith in the current model.

| Question 14: Is it time for a complete re-examination of the BC transfer model? | | |
|---|---|---|
| No – it's fine as it is | 3 | 2% |
| No – concentrate on improving the current model, not changing it | 46 | 36% |
| Yes, incrementally, but only if we are sure that there is a better approach | 58 | 45% |
| Yes – the current model no longer fits our post-secondary environment | 22 | 17% |
| **Total** | **129** | **100%** |

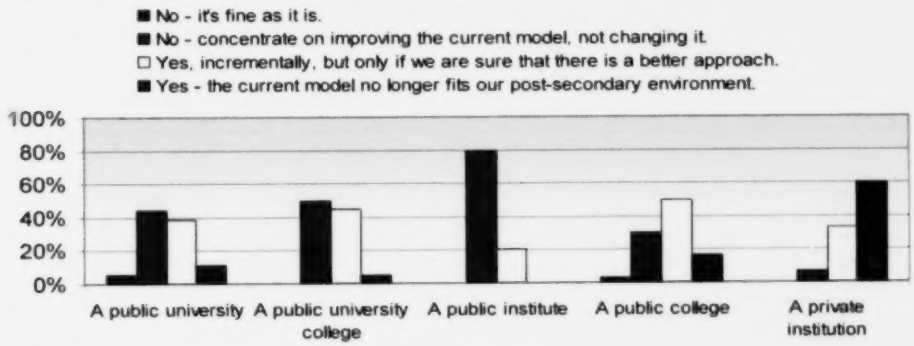
Who wants change? All categories of respondents except for those who identified themselves as staff were more inclined to choose option 3 than option 2.

**Question 14: Is it time for a complete re-examination of the BC Transfer Model?**




Respondents associated with public colleges and with private institutions were most inclined to favour change by choosing one or other of the yes answers (67% and 93%). University and university college respondents were evenly divided between yes and no choices, while a clear majority of institute and government respondents (only 5 individuals) choose no. However, since respondents from colleges represent a disproportionate number of the overall respondents, their responses have influenced the outcome for this question.

**Question 14: Is it time for a complete re-examination of the BC Transfer Model?**


No - it's fine as it is.
No - concentrate on improving the current model, not changing it.
Yes, incrementally, but only if we are sure that there is a better approach.
Yes - the current model no longer fits our post-secondary environment.
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
A public university
A public university college
A public institute
A public college
A private institution

Respondents were not offered an opportunity to provide a comment on Question 14, so we must infer from other responses and comments why they made their particular choice and what they mean by it. While it seems clear that there is a mood for change of some sort, it is not clear how that should be interpreted.

Private institutions, who are largely left in the cold, outside the system, are understandably in the change camp – however, whether what they want is a policy shift that holds the promise of including them versus a practice change to a new and different model of transfer (such as multilateral transfer) can only be inferred. For some public college respondents, it may be that loosening restrictions on institutional designation as sending or receiving may be enough. For others, however, nothing less than a radical overhaul may be indicated. In this desire we may be seeing echoes of the 1996 *Charting a New Course* recommendations that the transfer system needed to be replaced by a new model which does not privilege receiving institutions over sending institutions.

| Question 15: Should we explore adopting a multilateral transfer approach in specific programs? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 68 | 59% |
| No | 47 | 41% |
| **Total** | **115** | **100%** |

The consultation paper proposed multilateral transfer as an organizational structure for the BC Transfer Guide, to be a possible alternative to traditional bilateral transfer. Therefore we inserted this question to follow Question 14. However, adding the rider "in specific programs" softened the intent, so that many respondents treated this as an extension of Questions 10 and 11. These respondents interpreted multilateral transfer as a way of providing better information in select programs or disciplines, rather than as a way of re-organizing the BC Transfer Guide.

Our follow-up question, "If yes, which programs do you feel would be most suitable and/or open to this approach?" did nothing to reinforce that we wished respondents to think of multilateral transfer as an overall alternative organizational structure for the Guide. Nevertheless some respondents did indicate that it held promise as an alternate approach to more than just program information, as can be seen in responses to Question 16, below.

For those who concentrated on choosing a program, a wide variety of choices emerged, similarly to Questions 10 and 11. "Arts and sciences" were cited most often, along with many individual disciplines (math, history, etc.), but also almost all other program areas, from trades to business to health and human services to performing arts to tourism.

We also received many comments that indicated uncertainly – about 20% of all responses used phrases such as "not sure what this might look like," or "not certain what this would entail." Employment of the words "might," "may" or "cautious" also points towards the hesitancy with which many respondents approached this question. Some suggested that waiting to assess the outcome of current projects might be wise, or trying limited or pilot projects first, while others state their opinion that this model is clearly *not* suitable in all disciplines.

At the same time, some respondents are clearly enthusiastic about multilateral transfer as a concept and see it as a panacea approach, suitable for "all" or "most" programs. Some suggest that this approach is most applicable to programs where many students transfer – "where activity warrants effort." Some of the responses received to Question 9 ("What suggestions, other than your responses above, do you have for cost-effective solutions to providing transfer information not currently recorded in the BC Transfer Guide?") also manifestly endorsed the multilateral transfer model.

**Question 16: If you answered yes to Question #14, what other model or models of transfer might be investigated as we strive to improve transfer processes and information for students?**

We received over 50 responses to Question 16, incorporating a wide variety of suggestions. About 20% of respondents repeated their endorsement for the multilateral transfer model, or variations on it, such as the ABE and ESL transfer models. Several respondents cited models close to what is practiced in many US states – a combination of general education core curriculum and common course numbering systems. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was mentioned by several, as well as other national models (e.g. Australian, UK). The term block transfer was used by some, as well as references to basing transfer on learning outcomes. Finally, a few respondents indicated that liberalizing the sending/receiving designations of institutions would address many of the shortcomings of the current model.

## B. Annual Meeting of Articulation Chairs and System Liaison Persons

We shared with participants the responses to Question 14 and asked them the following questions:

1. *How would you encourage BCCAT to interpret these results?*

All participants advised us to interpret them cautiously. One group emphasized that some survey respondents did not have sufficient background on many of the issues to respondent knowledgeably. One group pointed out that the results are skewed by the preponderance of responses from a college or a faculty perspective. However, on the whole, the groups agreed that some change seems desirable.

2. *Is the multilateral transfer model a realistic and feasible alternative as a large scale approach to building the BC Transfer Guide?*

Participants responded that while multilateral transfer may be appropriate for some disciplines, it was definitely not suitable as an organizing structure for the Transfer Guide. As one group put it, "It is unrealistic to think that universities would cede control over whether deciding whether transfer courses met their standards, to a committee."

## C. Recommendations for Consideration

**Recommendation 7.1**

*That in contemplating changes in articulation and/or transfer policy or practice, BCCAT is guided by the principle of ensuring an efficient and effective transfer environment for students, while respecting the autonomy of institutions and their capacity to undertake changes in policy or practice.*

**Recommendation 7.2**

*That any changes to the structure of the BC Transfer System or to the nature and amount of transfer information available in the BC Transfer Guide be examined carefully to ensure that such changes do not result in unintended negative consequences for students or place undue administrative burdens on institutions or on BCCAT.*

**See also Recommendation 6.2.**

Other recommendations relevant to this section are to be determined and may be considered tantamount to the whole of recommendations provided in this report.

---

## ISSUE 8: Priorities, Suggestions and Advice

At the conclusion of the questionnaire, three open–ended questions were given with the intention of allowing respondents to provide recommendations, advice and opinions in an unconstrained manner.

**Question 17: Thinking of issues raised in this consultation, what issues or what solutions should receive the highest priority? (86 responses)**

**Question 18: What initiatives, other than those raised in this consultation, have the potential to improve the transfer experience for BC students? (52 responses)**

**Question 19: Any other ideas, comments or suggestions? (34 responses)**

Responses received to these questions fall into a category that we could loosely label advice to BCCAT. Many of the responses received to Question 9 ("What suggestions, other than your responses above, do you have for cost-effective solutions to providing transfer information not currently recorded in the BC Transfer Guide?") also fall into this category. Comments in the next section are drawn from responses to all four of these questions.

### A. Suggestions and Advice: Setting Priorities

It is not always possible to discern the intent of the respondent from free-form responses. However, analysis of the perceived intent of responses to Question 17 yields the following advice regarding the appropriate order of BCCAT priorities:

1) *Improve the current system* – Several sub-items can be clustered under this general heading.
   a) Lift designation restrictions: This item was referenced by the greatest number of individual respondents.
   b) Simplify: this heading covers suggestions to improve the system rather than change it, pleas for more efficiency and simplicity, and specific suggestions for improvement such as the use of triangulation.
   c) Provide better information within the current system: requests were fairly evenly divided between university to university transfer, college to college transfer, university college to college transfer, 3rd and 4th year transfer and transfer to BCIT.

2) *Investigate/promote alternative approaches* – This included multilateral transfer (most often mentioned as useful for key programs rather than as an alternative organising structure for the BC Transfer Guide), more block and program transfer and more use of Flexible Pre-Majors.

3) *Pursue public/private articulation* – However, 3 responses also referred to safeguarding quality as a priority and one respondent asked for "no formal articulation agreements between public and private institutions."

4) *Out-of-province transfer* – a few respondents felt this should be a priority.

The ICPs were asked to work in groups to prioritize specific issues identified in the Consultation paper. Their ranking of priorities was:

1) Lifting the restrictions on sending/receiving designations
2) Multilateral transfer in key programs.
3) Transfer protocols and promotion of the Flexible Pre-Major
4) Private-public articulation.

The use of transfer protocols received little support as a priority for action from survey respondents, while out-of-province transfer was perceived to be low priority by the ICPs. What was not prioritized by either survey respondents or ICPs is also interesting, namely the concept of regional transfer guides.

**B. Suggestions and Advice: Disseminating Information**

One inference that can be drawn from responses is that BCCAT has to do a better job of advertising its resources. For example, one respondent suggests: "Why not have a person at BCCAT that students can call/e-mail to get help?" He/she is seemingly unaware that students can and do call and email us for help – in fact the Transfer Guide Coordinator responds to hundreds of student inquiries each year. Another suggests that BCCAT develop resources to assist faculty evaluate course outlines – precisely the function of the recently developed *How to Articulate Handbook.*

Several respondents spoke to the need to promote the BC Transfer System to high school students, and to raise everyone's awareness of how well transfer students do so that they would be truly "valued" especially at universities. A typical comment: "Information directed at students in high school so they are aware they can begin their studies at institutions near home, obviating the need for many of them to deal with the increased expectations of school and living on their own together. I am not certain secondary students have a complete grasp of the transfer system." In the light of these comments, it is of interest to note that BCCAT is currently formulating strategies aimed at promoting the transfer system to secondary school students and their parents.

Others mentioned the need to provide assurances to transfer students that there will be places for them – through "guarantees" or elimination of "bottlenecks." Several respondents mentioned BCcampus as an asset in the system.

## C. Suggestions and Advice: Public/Private Articulation

Both sides of the public/private debate received due attention in responses to Questions 9, 18 and 19. For those who are not supportive of articulation with private institutions this was a final chance to air concerns and to reiterate the link between private institutions and challenges to quality. For example: "I would also be concerned about adding private institutions to the sending category, as I foresee they would use the system to better sell their courses, not to facilitate transfer. That is not good value for us." And "...private to public institution transfer should be less urgent."

However, several comments are supportive of the inclusion of private institutions. One respondent felt that the priority should be "Developing mechanisms for transfer from PCTIA -accredited private career training institution programs into public colleges, university colleges and BCIT. Another stated that priority should be given to "Having the public schools make an effort to work more closely with their private counterparts for the benefits of all students." As his/her final comment, one respondent urges "Include private institutions as sending and receiving institutions - why should students in these institutions be discriminated against?" Another says, "Do not exclude private colleges just put in safeguards for standards."

## D. Suggestions and Advice: Technology

Several respondents suggested using technology to add value or simplify transfer processes. Examples include:

> "Introduce a common application process for all BC universities and colleges with a single application form and fee that lists all programs at all colleges and universities across BC."
>
> "It would be nice to integrate data resources tracking student motion through post-secondary systems with post-education outcomes. In other words, provide a means by which BC employers could supply data on where their students are coming from."
>
> "Web enabled application process where a student can enter the courses that they have completed or intend to complete and have the system let the student know the school for which they will meet the pre-requisite requirements."
>
> "Provide institutions with access to the BCCAT transfer tables to enable us to develop our own automatic processes."
>
> "The Transfer Guide could be partially maintained and kept current by the institutions; information could be updated using a password."
>
> "Integration between the BC Transfer Guide and online calendars could provide transfer information in an accessible format."

## E. Suggestions and Advice: Articulation Challenges and the Role of Faculty

Articulation committees and articulation challenges and innovations received much attention, as in the following comments:

> "Annual articulation meetings should provide more decisions or agreements between institutions."

"It would be nice if institutions could applied [sic] detailed self-analysis of their courses in terms of standard curricula topics or learning objectives. For instance, for Computer Science, there is the ACM model curricula. If receiving institution then had access to sending institutions grids, they could see what topics the sending institution courses mapped onto, and then how that maps onto their own courses. One universal detailed topic list for a subject area (supplied by a provincial articulation committee), could then be mapped by all institutions against their own courses."

"... I believe that for the majority of transfer credits, having the accepting school decide which credits to accept and which to deny is fundamentally flawed. If a student is denied transfer credits and is required to retake courses at the accepting school then the accepting school makes more money. This may be in the schools best interests, but not the students. I believe there needs to be a third party, objective organization that has the authority to decide which courses are equivalent between schools."

"Perhaps a model that might be investigated is the articulation of courses across faculties at a large university. "The following courses are considered equivalent..." rather than forcing course by course articulation."

"There is a major gap in knowledge between the people who participate in articulation meetings (usually program/department heads) and the people actually assessing the courses (usually faculty members in the relevant area). ... I have seen some appallingly inadequate transfer requests being granted credit because the faculty member doing the assessment either didn't know or didn't care what to examine and compare."

"Explore the recognition of bi-direction e.g. course A (sending) = course B (receiving) and therefore course B = course A."

"There should be no pressure at all for departments to hire instructors with specific discipline credentials, especially in the field of emerging technologies. There is a need to foster inter-disciplinary perspectives."

"Better alignment between course transfer and program curriculum requirements."

"The message needs to be clearer from BCCAT and elsewhere that schools receiving transfer requests have the right to refuse credit, and that this may happen if the course is not equivalent or if sufficient information is not provided. Schools who tend to send out transfer requests rather than receive them could do a much better job of ensuring equivalencies rather than having their students disappointed."

"There are serious concerns with academic quality of students transfer from some of the private and public colleges. Departments experiencing, over time, continued poor performance by students by students in specific courses where the pre-requisite is obtained by transfer credit at a BC college, may consider sanctions. These sanctions would be imposed by the departments. The goal is to provide students with the best chance to succeed in their university courses."

Several respondents reminded us of the centrality of faculty to the work of transfer and articulation, and the need to provide support for that work. The following comment exemplifies the sentiments expressed:

> "Changes should be made using the expertise of faculty at all stages of the process rather than relying on bureaucrats - nothing should be done without faculty consultation and consent. Bureaucrats, even within the teaching institutions, seem to have little idea of what we really do and what our difficulties really might be. All that said (and this is not BCCAT's fault) over the last 10 years faculty workloads have increased hugely because of administrative tasks constantly downloaded onto them. Simply adding this project as yet one more piece of volunteer labour will not be helpful or welcomed. People who work on this stuff will need some actual leave time to do it. A snatched hour or two here and there will probably not be all that useful."

**F. <u>Suggestions and Advice: Miscellaneous</u>**

Finally, there were some comments and suggestions that defy categorization, some that encourage BCCAT to think in boldly different ways, and some that present unusual solutions.

> "A Bill presented to the BC Legislature by the Minister responsible for Advanced Education requiring that the province's post-secondary institutions work to build bridges for transfer credit rather than roadblocks with specific, timely, and measurable targets."
>
> "...development of a national transfer system so students can determine how their courses will be received by institutions in other provinces."
>
> "An initiative involving the incorporation of an objective, third party that can make decisions about transfer credits instead of the schools doing it themselves. If a particular faculty in a university, for example, has its funding levels determined by enrolment, how can a group of people from that faculty possibly be expected to be objective when considering whether or not another school's curriculum is equivalent to its own?"
>
> "Reversal of process. Instead of people applying to be in the guide, the guide should be looking at institutions that operate within BC and inviting them to be in the transfer guide."
>
> "The major issue seems to be around the Transfer guide as "a form of accreditation" and BCCAT's gatekeeper function. I suggest that the guide be dropped along with the concept of Sending/Receiving institutions. BCCAT should focus on simplifying the process of access to reliable information for students. Flattening the hierarchy and reducing the bureaucracy and redundancy will help. Each individual institution is responsible for making and managing their own articulations and already track them. BCCAT should be a support service to institutions and students and continue their help with policies and standards, etc. 1. Drop designations, drop the guide as it exists now, drop the "accreditation" power. 2. Agreements/guarantees/MOUs should be the foundation and starting point, and these should be published online by the institutions and BCCAT. 3. BCCAT should focus on providing tools for students to get the information they need, such as online links to institutional listings of transferable courses, rather than trying to control the listings. 4. Statistics on the courses and # of students given credit for those courses should be published online by each institution and collated by BCCAT or just linked, or an online tool provided for collating relevant courses for students. Institutions must be required to report these annual or semi annual statistics. 5. BCCAT should be focusing its energy more on global, or at least pan Canadian standards, criteria, tools, information, collaborations, etc., to best serve the future world of students."

## G. Recommendations for Consideration

**Recommendation 8.1**:

*That, once Council has had an opportunity to review this report, it establishes an order of priority in which action items should be addressed. Consideration may be given to ranking the following items highest:*

1) *Exploring whether and how best to lift restrictions on sending/receiving designations for all institutions*
2) *Continuing to promote and provide funding for articulation projects such as multilateral transfer, Flexible Pre-Major and block transfer, in specific disciplines.*
3) *Exploring what transfer, currently conducted on a case-by-case basis, should or could be converted to articulation-based transfer. Start with areas where relevant groups or institutions are willing to participate.*
4) *Working on public-private articulation issues.*
5) *Examining appropriate recording of inter-provincial transfer.*

**Recommendation 8.2**

*That, given the importance of hearing from students, and given the low response rate received from students to the Recalibrating survey, that an additional survey be designed, targeted at students, with an invitation to participate posted on the BC Transfer Guide website.*

**Recommendation 8.3**

*That BCCAT, in its communication plan, emphasize the dissemination of its information resources to appropriate target audiences, and examine how best to make its technology accessible to institutions through web services.*

## CONCLUSIONS

It is interesting to compare this survey with the last large-scale survey that BCCAT undertook: the Block Transfer survey of 1997. That survey was conducted by similar means – that is, a discussion paper which raised issues for debate and a series of questions based on those issues. Like the current survey, the 1997 examination grew from the need to address the changing environment for post-secondary education and was prompted by statements regarding the shortcomings of the transfer system made in the strategic planning document *Charting a New Course*.

The main points of contrast between the two surveys lie in the response rate and respondent profile. About fifty responses to the 1997 survey were received, by mail, mostly in the form of official responses from institutions and representative groups, with 18% of responses coming from individuals. Many responses did not address the questions asked, or all the questions asked, and responses in general were more free-ranging in nature. In contrast, three times as many responses were received to the current survey, likely due to the increased ease provided by the online format. However, only 19% of these responses were from institutions and representative groups, with the vast majority of responses being from individuals. Most respondents answered all the questions, and provided substantive comment in support of their answers.

The greatest point of similarity between the two surveys lies in the ultimately conservative nature of the overall response. The conclusion reached in the 1997 report was that the system was not broken, but could use improvement. The overriding impression left by the 2006 Recalibrating survey is that respondents will contemplate meaningful change but only if it improves the current system, and does not result in unintended negative consequences, given that the system is already functioning well. The fact that both surveys resulted in a similar outcome, can be traced to the nature of the participant pool. What we received on both occasions was the views of those *inside* the system. As insiders, many respondents contributed invaluable analysis, insight and critique, and many championed the maintenance of high standards and of safeguards against inappropriate or problematic expansion, especially at the expense of core services. However, like Kluckhohn's fish[4], they may not be as inclined to take a truly impartial look at the system, or to recognize their own privileged access to it.

In the course of the current survey we received unambiguous, decisive advice on only one question: it is clear that survey respondents (94%) want BCCAT to lift the current restrictions that result in most institutions being designated as either sending institutions or receiving institutions. In the face-to-face meetings in which this question was discussed participants agreed that it is time to move forward on this change. In these meetings and in survey comments, however, we were cautioned that it should be done only once a careful examination has been undertaken to ensure that implementation does not place undue burdens on institutions.

[4] "It would hardly be fish who discovered the existence of water." Clyde Kluckhohn. *Mirror for Man.* 1949.

Lifting the current restrictions on sending and receiving designations is clearly in the interests of current members of the BC Transfer System, especially when the change happens carefully and incrementally. All other responses, even those where we discern a clear majority, are characterized by ambivalence to greater or lesser degrees. Two thirds of survey respondents, for example, indicated that it is time to examine whether some form of out-of-province articulation might be justifiable, but there was considerably less support for this in the face-to-face meetings. There is clear support among many survey respondents for trying to improve transfer in academic disciplines through the Flexible Pre-Major approach (71%), but the universities and the university faculty group who responded, without whose cooperation Flexible Pre-Major agreements would be difficult to reach, were dubious about the merits of this approach. Fifty-seven percent of respondents said yes to recording public/private articulation agreements, but the concerns revealed in the accompanying comments go a long way towards tempering this response.

This creates some dilemmas regarding how best to advance in some areas. What we see is a system that is open to change, but only where it can be assured that this change will proceed in a careful and balanced manner, and will not jeopardize either institutional resources or the standards and quality-checking mechanisms that underlie and support the transfer system. The quandary is that, in BC and in Canada, there are few universally accepted and well-understood quality assurance processes upon which the system can rely for reassurance that standards will not fall if the system is expanded. We have no national or regional institutional accreditation process, no quality assurance boards except for degree programs, and no fail-safe methods of distinguishing between high-quality and low-quality private institutions. Similarly, we have no pan-Canadian transfer environment, or well-entrenched articulation mechanisms in most provinces besides Alberta, or across provincial boundaries. Expansion of the system in such a handicapped environment must be undertaken with the utmost care.

But move forward we must, realizing that we may not accomplish everything contained in the recommendations and this may be disappointing for some. Change in values and culture takes time. Ultimately, our goal must be to achieve what is most helpful for students, those both inside and outside the BC Transfer System. Making progress towards that goal, while respecting institutional autonomy and resource constraints, and being mindful of the demographic social and economic context for the BC post-secondary system in the next 10 to 20 years, will require strategic and careful planning. As a start, and even though it may seem overly cautious in the light of the already extensive consultation process, it is probably prudent for the Council to approve recommendations in principle at this point, and for those recommendations to be discussed one more time by select system groups.

# APPENDIX:

## Consultation Paper and Questions

BRITISH COLUMBIA COUNCIL ON
ADMISSIONS & TRANSFER
SUPPORTING BC's EDUCATION SYSTEM

# A BCCAT CONSULTATION

## RECALIBRATING THE BC TRANSFER SYSTEM

kāl'ə-brāt': to adjust precisely for a particular function *Merriam– Webster Online*

## Introduction and Background

### The BC Transfer System

A defining characteristic of the British Columbia post-secondary system has been its commitment to facilitating student mobility within a context of multiple autonomous institutions. Since all credentials are not available in all locations, many BC students are *required* to transfer to pursue their educational goals. In response, the British Columbia Transfer System has evolved over four decades to provide alternate points of access to degree-level education, and to develop the polices and practices through which students can move between institutions and be appropriately credited for the courses and programs they have successfully completed.

> Providing the BC Transfer Guide as a centralized transfer resource is universally acknowledged to be invaluable to institutions and students, and key to the success of the BC Transfer System.

### The BC Transfer Guide: the Map through the System

The BC Transfer Guide provides centralized information necessary for planning a transfer route to a credential. The Guide contains over 60,000 active course-to-course transfer agreements, while supplemental information, such as block transfer agreements and program-specific transfer tables, has grown in recent years.

Based on the assumption that colleges send students to finish a degree, and that universities receive those students, the information in the Guide has been structured to designate the role of *sending institution* or *receiving institution* to each institution. In recent years university colleges and the BC Open University (now Thompson Rivers University–Open Learning, or TRU-OL) have been designated as *both* sending and receiving institutions.

### Articulation-Based Transfer versus Case-by-Case Assessment

In the articulation process, a sending institution provides a course outline to a receiving institution, which assesses the outline for equivalence to its own courses and responds by granting or denying transfer credit. The resulting decision is recorded in the BC Transfer Guide. Articulating a course enables students to see in advance of transfer what credit they will receive and, of critical importance, how that credit can be applied to their intended degree. Thus, *articulation-based transfer* is highly advantageous for students. Although there are costs

There are two steps in this consultation:

1. Read this paper.
2. Respond at: http://www.bccat.bc.ca/consultation

involved in the initial assessment of equivalence and the maintenance of articulation agreements, it is an economical approach for transfer involving large numbers of students since it obviates the need for case-by-case assessments.

Since all institutional members of the BC Transfer System are committed to a policy of awarding transfer credit where appropriate, transfer can and does happen in the absence of formal articulation. Hundreds of students move every year in BC from one institution to another (e.g. from college to college) to continue their education and are awarded transfer credit, normally as a result of a case-by-case examination of their courses. If few students are transferring between two institutions, articulation may be unnecessary and *case-by-case assessment* can be the least expensive solution to assigning appropriate credit.

**This consultation asks whether we have the right balance of articulation-based transfer versus case-by-case assessment in our current system, and if not, how to adjust our practices and structures to recalibrate that balance.**

It is impractical, and likely impossible, to negotiate articulation agreements for every course that students may attempt to transfer. The real task of a highly functional transfer environment is to utilize articulation-based transfer where it makes sense to do so and to rely on case-by-case assessment to ensure that students, in the absence of specific articulations, can still transfer their credits appropriately and be treated equitably as they move through the system.

## A Changing Environment for Transfer

While the balance of articulation-based transfer versus case-by-case assessment may have been reasonably acceptable for many years, that balance operates within the wider context of the post-secondary environment. That environment has been changing steadily over the past decade and will continue to do so, influenced by many factors:

- Institutional mandates are changing: the increasing variety of degree programs creates an ever widening array of transfer destinations for students.
- As more students apply for associate degrees, colleges require more information about courses completed at other sending institutions in order to assess if a student has met the requirements of the credential.
- Several institutions have relaxed their residency requirements: a 25% residency requirement (rather than the traditional 50%) means that students can request transfer credit for more third and fourth year courses.
- The online world offers students the opportunity to take courses from many institutions, both inside and outside BC.
- Private post-secondary institutions have created new avenues for education and training in BC, although few bridges have been built between the private and public systems so far.

Recent preliminary analyses of integrated data from the Central Data Warehouse (CDW) and the university sector reveal the extent of mobility for student with transferable courses between public institutions in BC.[1] The CDW data show a transfer system that is alive and well, and demonstrate that the value of transfer is deeply embedded in the culture of the BC post-secondary system. However, the data also reveal that traditional transfer patterns are shifting.

1 A set of slides summarizing some of these preliminary data can be found at www.bccat.bc.ca/consultation

In fact, up to half of all the students measured in this data set may now move in directions *other* than the traditional college to university route.

## Issue Number 1:
## Students are transferring in non-traditional directions, but little transfer information is available to help them plan because of the current structure of the BC Transfer Guide

Since it is already demonstrably the case that every institution in the BC Transfer System is both a sending and a receiving institution to a greater or lesser degree, it is timely and appropriate to ask whether and how this should be reflected in the Guide.

**Currently, students have difficulty exploring what transfer credit they will receive if they transfer :**

- **to BCIT;**
- **from a university;**
- **during their third or fourth year;**
- **in many program areas other than academic/ university transfer or business;**
- **From a university college to a college;**
- **between colleges; or,**
- **to or from most private institutions.**

While many students appear to manage the transfer process to non-traditional destinations despite the lack of information, others may conclude that transfer opportunities are limited to those institutions designated as receiving institutions in the Guide. In this case, the organizational structure of the Guide may have the unintended consequence of reducing students' knowledge and utilization of the rich array of choices available to them in BC. Several institutions have notified BCCAT of their interest in adding the complementary function to their designation (e.g. a sending institution adding the receiving institution function), but changing the structure of the BC Transfer Guide has a number of implications.

**For arguments and implications, go to Table 1, Page 4**

## Issue Number 2:
## Planning for transfer within a discipline can be difficult

Previous consultations have revealed that the single biggest obstacle to transfer for academic students is fulfilling requirements for the pre-major before they transfer. Since students cannot be sure where they will be accepted, they must identify the first and second year requirements for the major (the pre-major), which can vary between multiple institutions, and try to juggle the courses they take in order to keep their options open. As more degree programs are offered, this task becomes increasingly difficult for students and for smaller colleges. For several years BCCAT has been offering grants to articulation committees to investigate a Flexible Pre-Major in specific disciplines. So far, a Flexible Pre-Major has been implemented in Music, and projects are underway or planned in Sociology/Anthropology, Mathematics and English.

Several programs, especially in applied and professional areas, have worked hard to simplify transfer pathways for students and to provide information critical to planning a transfer route. The Program Transfer section of the Guide contains examples of such program-specific projects. For example, Early Childhood Education programs have collaborated to design a transfer guide that takes into account the variety of ways in which ECE programs are delivered across institutions; Tourism Programs have developed block transfer agreements among themselves; and Adult Education Programs have collated detailed information on their transfer credit practices. It remains true, however, that little program-specific information exists centrally to guide students.

## Table 1: Changing the Structure of the BC Transfer Guide

| Arguments | Implications |
|---|---|
| Students will have access to a more comprehensive array of transfer information. | Each additional sending and receiving institution will inflate the number of agreements in the Guide, perhaps creating unmanageable complexity. |
| Now that there is no longer a printed Guide, maintaining multiple transfer agreements electronically is much easier. | The work required at institutions - of faculty in articulating courses for credit, and of a registrar's office in administering the underlying systems - will increase substantially, especially with the addition of new sending institutions. |
| Institutions with new degree programs need to inform students about their transfer options – otherwise students may only see traditional transfer possibilities. | A college with one or two degree programs may need to examine the cost-benefit of the work involved in becoming a receiving institution, or decide to limit their receiving function to those degree programs.<br>For those who wish to develop articulation-based transfer, an initial process of establishing agreements through triangulation[2] may be a good start. |
| Students need information on how third and fourth year courses will transfer. | Most institutions grant appropriate upper level transfer without the need for articulation agreements, but some transfer routes or disciplines may benefit from upper level course-to-course articulation. |
| The CDW data reveal students "swirling" within geographical regions. They may need more regional rather than more provincial transfer information. | Regional transfer guides (e.g. a Greater Vancouver Guide, a Northern Guide) in which all institutions in a given region were designated as sending/receiving for the purposes of articulating with each other could provide useful supplementary information. |
| Institutions can best decide what is in their own and their students' interests, and BCCAT should facilitate their requests, without undue interference or red tape. | As the "coordinator" of the BC Transfer System, BCCAT may need to set criteria for re-designation in order to ensure that any institution requesting an additional designation has the means to support the request, and that one institution's decision does not cause increased workload at another, without its consent. |
| Signing transfer protocols between institutions – or transfer guarantees for transferable courses – can probably cover most transfer eventualities without the need for time-consuming articulations. | A transfer protocol is useful in that students will know they will receive some type of transfer credit. However, since having the *right* credit is essential (i.e. credit that can be applied to their chosen program), a transfer protocol is not always helpful, nor does it encourage or facilitate detailed planning. |

2 Triangulation: Establishing credit between two institutions by comparing what credit a given course receives at a third institution. Premise: if A=C, and B=C, then A=B.

## Issue Number 3:
## Transfer information is limited to institutions within the BC Transfer System

BCCAT, with the concurrence of all members of the BC Transfer System, has recently implemented a new policy whereby private institutions with ministerial consent to offer a degree can be included, for the approved programs, in the BC Transfer Guide. The key to acceptance has been a quality assessment process, originally performed by The University Presidents' Council, and now by the Degree Quality Assessment Board.

Some private *non-degree* institutions have also successfully negotiated formal articulation agreements with public institutions. In this case, it can be argued that a similar quality assessment process has been conducted, since the public institution has thoroughly reviewed the standards of instruction, the level of curriculum, and the quality of the students' learning. As partners to these agreements, some BC public institutions would like them recorded in the BC Transfer Guide. However, since the private institutions are not yet members of the BC Transfer System, BCCAT has no policy or mechanism to allow this.

The BC Transfer Guide also, by policy, excludes transfer agreements outside British Columbia, with the sole historical exception of Yukon College. However, many students in BC take courses from institutions outside BC, and this is especially true of Athabasca University (AU). About 10 – 12% of AU's 50,000 course registrants are BC residents, many intending to transfer the credit to a BC institution. Providing information on the transferability of AU courses to BC institutions could be a significant service to BC students. Similarly, many students in the eastern areas of BC transfer to Alberta institutions and may benefit from publicly recorded articulation agreements. Students are transferring to and from institutions outside the BC Transfer System. BCCAT needs to know what information, if any, should be provided to facilitate this movement.

## Issue Number 4:
## It may be time to talk about more fundamental change.

While expanding transfer information within the current sending/receiving model may hold the promise of better addressing students' and institutions' current and emerging needs, it may also be timely to investigate new organizational structures. For existing alternatives, we can look to different models within our own system and to examples from the U.S. and Europe.

A successful example of *multilateral transfer* already exists in the form of the Business Management Transfer Guide, which provides transfer information for all business programs offered within the BC Transfer System except for those at research universities. Readers will immediately recognize that it provides transfer information in ways that differ significantly from the traditional sending/receiving model.

## Table 2:
## Sending/ Receiving versus Multilateral Transfer Models

| Sending/Receiving | Multilateral Transfer |
|---|---|
| Designates institutions as sending or receiving | No sending or receiving designation |
| Assessment of equivalence done by faculty/ department | Assessment done by provincial-level peer committee |
| Ongoing updating and maintenance | Updating once or twice per year |
| Transfer credit negotiation does not happen at Articulation Committee meetings. | Articulation committees are fully involved in the negotiation process |
| Institution retains control of assessment | Control is partially ceded to peer committee |

Converting the BC Transfer Guide to this kind of structure would consume significant time and resources and would require entirely different articulation processes to those currently in place. It could also be argued that expanding the number of sending and receiving institutions will solve the problem, in that students will be able to see how their courses will transfer to most institutions.

However, many individuals feel that we are overdue for an examination of the constraints imposed by the sending institution role, and may view multilateral transfer as inherently more democratic and more acknowledging of the parity which ideally should exist between institutions in a transfer system. The question is, would this benefit outweigh the huge costs involved in such a seismic shift in transfer polices and processes? Piloting multilateral transfer guides in specific programs may provide insight.

While space does not permit in-depth examination of other models, interested readers may want to look at the following two:

- Many American states have addressed the need to simplify transfer through a state-wide agreement on a Transfer General Education Core Curriculum, or GECC. A good example of a state-wide GECC agreement can be found in Arizona.
- The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) has been developed in the complete absence of a transfer culture, and with the objectives of crossing not just institutional but also national, cultural and linguistic boundaries.

**The challenge is to stay at the forefront of best practice, to innovate where current practice is insufficient, and to do it all within a cost-efficient framework that meets the needs of students and institutions.**

## Conclusion

We can reasonably anticipate the continuing transformation of the BC post-secondary environment, prompting the question – what changes can we make now that will best prepare us to meet the challenges of the next decades? The BC Transfer System is recognized as a leader in the field of transfer policy and practice in North America and other jurisdictions often look to our resources and our experience for assistance with their own issues. The challenge, then, is to stay at the forefront of best practice, to innovate where current practice is insufficient, and to do it all within a cost-efficient framework that meets the needs of students and institutions.

### Options for Responding

1. Go to: http://www.bccat.bc.ca/consultation and follow the link to an online survey. This should take less than half an hour of your time. You can remain anonymous if you wish.
2. If you prefer, you can email a response to articulation@bccat.bc.ca. This may be preferable for those responding formally on behalf of an institution or organization, or those who wish to address issues beyond the survey questions.

We invite responses from groups such as an institution, an Education Council, a department or faculty, an articulation committee, a system agency, etc. We are equally happy to receive individual responses.

**DEADLINE FOR RESPONSE: FEBRUARY 28, 2006**

## Issue #1: Corresponding Survey Questions

1. Should all institutions be able to request designation as both a sending and receiving institution? *(Yes/No)*

2. What criteria, if any, should be applied to re-designation approval?

   - *None - institutions are in the best position to decide if and when they can support re-designation.*
   - *Institutions should be asked to provide assurances to BCCAT that they can support the functions associated with re-designation.*
   - *Other.*

3. If you answered "Other" in Question 2, please describe what criteria should be applied to re-designation approval.

4. Should BCCAT encourage the development of regional transfer guides, in which all institutions in a given region could request designation as both sending and receiving institutions? *(Yes/No)*

5. If yes, which region might be the best place to start, on a pilot basis?

   - *Greater Vancouver*
   - *Fraser Valley*
   - *Vancouver Island*
   - *Northern BC*
   - *Okanagan/Interior*
   - *Other region(s), please specify*

6. Should institutions sending or receiving few transfer students be encouraged to sign transfer protocols or guarantees, rather than negotiate multiple articulation agreements? *(Yes/No)*

   *Please give reasons for your answer.*

7. What transfer, currently conducted through case-by-case assessment would be helpful to students if converted to articulation-based transfer? *(Check all that apply)*

   - *University to university*
   - *Transfer to BCIT*
   - *College to college*
   - *Transfer in applied or vocational programs*
   - *University college to college*
   - *Third and fourth year courses*
   - *Other, please specify*

8. Given the time and costs required to convert to articulation-based transfer, what information should be made available first? (Select one)

   - *University to university*
   - *Transfer to BCIT*
   - *College to college*
   - *Transfer in applied or vocational programs*
   - *University college to college*
   - *Third and fourth year courses*
   - *Other, please specify*

9. What suggestions, other than your responses above, do you have for cost-effective solutions to providing transfer information not currently recorded in the BC Transfer Guide?

## Issue #2: Corresponding Survey Questions

10. Should BCCAT be encouraging and providing support for more Flexible Pre-Major projects in academic disciplines? *(Yes/No)*

    *If yes, which disciplines might be suitable for and/or open to this approach?*

11. Do we need more program-specific transfer information? *(Yes/No)*

    *If yes, what are the critical programs we should be pursuing?*

BCCAT would like to hear all creative and thoughtful ideas, without limiting debate, on alternatives to the sending/receiving model.

## Issue #3: Corresponding Survey Questions

12. Should we include articulation agreements with private non-member institutions in the BC Transfer Guide, at the request of the receiving institution, provided that the receiving institution is a member of the BC Transfer System? *(Yes/No)*

    *Why or why not?*

13. Should we consider justifiable exceptions to the policy of limiting transfer information to institutions within BC? *(Yes/No)*

    *If yes, what criteria might be used to describe a justifiable exception?*

## Issue #4: Corresponding Survey Questions

14. Is it time for a complete re-examination of the BC transfer model?

    - *No, it's fine as it is.*
    - *No, concentrate on improving the current model, not changing it.*
    - *Yes, incrementally, but only if we are sure that there's a better approach.*
    - *Yes, the current model no longer fits our post-secondary environment.*

15. Should we explore adopting a multilateral transfer approach in specific programs? *(Yes/No)*

    *If yes, which programs do you feel would be most suitable and/or open to this approach?*

16. If you answered yes to Question #14, what other model or models of transfer might be investigated as we strive to improve transfer processes and information for students?

## Conclusion: Corresponding Survey Questions

17. Thinking of issues raised in this consultation, what issues or what solutions should receive the highest priority?

18. What initiatives, other than those raised in this consultation, have the potential to improve the transfer experience for BC students?

19. Any other ideas, comments or suggestions?